This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

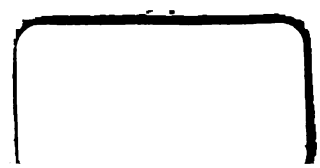
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

UC-NRLF
B 3 862 762

BERKELEY
LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA



MEMOIRS

OF

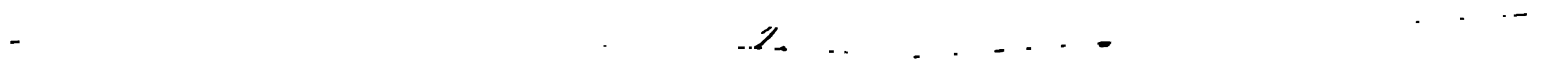
THE LIFE

OF

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

VOL. II.



J. Nathaniel Lothey

Pub.d by Longman & Co Aug.t 1825

MEMOIRS

OF

THE LIFE

OF

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

BY THOMAS MOORE.

THE FIFTH EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR

LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWN, AND GREEN,

PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1826.

Republished, 1968
Scholarly Press – 560 Cook Road – Grosse Pointe, Michigan 48236

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 29-7325

Paper used in this edition is
a fine acid-free, permanent/durable paper
of the type commonly referred to as
"300-year" paper

PR3683
M6
1968
v.2

CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAPTER XII.

Death of Mr. Sheridan's Father. — Verses by Mrs. Sheridan on the Death of her Sister, Mrs. Tickell. - - 1

CHAPTER XIII.

Illness of the King. — Regency. — Private Life of Mr. Sheridan. - - - - - - - - - 18

CHAPTER XIV.

French Revolution. — Mr. Burke. — His Breach with Mr. Sheridan. — Dissolution of Parliament. — Mr. Burke and Mr. Fox. — Russian Armament. — Royal Scotch Boroughs. - - - - - - - - 91

CHAPTER XV.

Death of Mrs. Sheridan. - - - - - 141

CHAPTER XVI.

Drury Lane Theatre. — Society of "The Friends of the People." — Madame de Genlis. — War with France. — Whig Seceders. — Speeches in Parliament. — Death of Tickell. - - - - - - - - - 178

CHAPTER XVII.

Speech in Answer to Lord Mornington. — Coalition of the Whig Seceders with Mr. Pitt. — Mr. Canning. — Evidence on the Trial of Horne Tooke. — "The Glorious First of June." — Marriage of Mr. Sheridan. — Pamphlet of Mr. Reeves. — Debts of the Prince of Wales. — Shakspeare Manuscripts. — Trial of Stone. — Mutiny at the Nore. — Secession of Mr. Fox from Parliament. - - 233

CHAPTER XVIII.

Play of "The Stranger." — Speeches in Parliament. — Pizarro. — Ministry of Mr. Addington. — French Institute. — Negotiations with Mr. Kemble. - - - 275

CHAPTER XIX.

State of Parties. — Offer of a place to Mr. T. Sheridan. — Receivership of the Duchy of Cornwall bestowed upon Mr. Sheridan. — Return of Mr. Pitt to Power. — Catholic Question. — Administration of Lord Grenville and Mr. Fox. — Death of Mr. Fox. — Representation of Westminster. — Dismission of the Ministry. — Theatrical Negotiation. — Spanish Question. — Letter to the Prince. 310

CHAPTER XX.

Destruction of the Theatre of Drury Lane by Fire. — Mr. Whitbread. — Plan for a Third Theatre — Illness of the King. — Regency. — Lord Grey and Lord Grenville. — Conduct of Mr. Sheridan. — His Vindication of himself. 366

CHAPTER XXI.

Affairs of the new Theatre. — Mr. Whitbread. — Negotiations with Lord Grey and Lord Grenville. — Conduct of Mr. Sheridan relative to the Household. — His last Words in Parliament. — Failure at Stafford. — Correspondence with Mr. Whitbread. — Lord Byron. — Distresses of Sheridan. — Illness. — Death and Funeral. — General Remarks. - - - - - - 410

MEMOIRS

OF

THE LIFE

OF

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

CHAPTER XII.

DEATH OF MR. SHERIDAN'S FATHER.—VERSES BY MRS. SHERIDAN ON THE DEATH OF HER SISTER, MRS. TICKELL.

In the summer of this year the father of Mr. Sheridan died. He had been recommended to try the air of Lisbon for his health, and had left Dublin for that purpose, accompanied by his younger daughter. But the rapid increase of his malady prevented him from proceeding farther than Margate, where he died about the

CHAP. XII.

1788.

beginning of August, attended in his last moments by his son Richard.

We have seen with what harshness, to use no stronger term, Mr. Sheridan was for many years treated by his father, and how persevering and affectionate were the efforts, in spite of many capricious repulses, that he made to be restored to forgiveness and favour. In his happiest moments, both of love and fame, the thought of being excluded from the paternal roof came across him with a chill that seemed to sadden all his triumph.* When it is considered, too, that the father, to whom he felt thus amiably, had never distinguished him by any particular kindness, but, on the contrary, had always shown a marked preference for the disposition and abilities of his brother Charles—it is impossible not to acknowledge, in such true filial affection, a proof that talent was not the only ornament of Sheridan, and that, however unfavourable to moral culture was the life that he led, Nature, in forming his mind, had implanted there virtue, as well as genius.

Of the tender attention which he paid to his father on his death-bed, I am enabled to lay before the reader no less a testimony than the letters written at the time by Miss Sheridan,

* See the letter written by him immediately after his marriage, Vol. I. page 118, and the anecdote in page 167.

who, as I have already said, accompanied the old gentleman from Ireland, and now shared with her brother the task of comforting his last moments. And, here,—it is difficult even for contempt to keep down the indignation, that one cannot but feel at those slanderers, under the name of biographers, who, calling in malice to the aid of their ignorance, have not scrupled to assert that the father of Sheridan died unattended by any of his nearest relatives!—Such are ever the marks that Dulness leaves behind, in its Gothic irruptions into the sanctuary of departed Genius—defacing what it cannot understand, polluting what it has not the soul to reverence, and taking revenge for its own darkness, by the wanton profanation of all that is sacred in the eyes of others.

Immediately on the death of their father, Sheridan removed his sister to Deepden—a seat of the Duke of Norfolk in Surrey, which His Grace had lately lent him—and then returned, himself, to Margate, to pay the last tribute to his father's remains. The letters of Miss Sheridan are addressed to her elder sister in Ireland, and the first, which I shall give entire, was written a day or two after her arrival at Deepden.

CHAP. XII.

1788.

" Dibden, August 18.

" My dear Love,

" Though you have ever been uppermost in my thoughts, yet it has not been in my power to write since the few lines I sent from Margate. I hope this will find you, in some degree, recovered from the shock you must have experienced from the late melancholy event. I trust to your own piety and the tenderness of your worthy husband, for procuring you such a degree of calmness of mind as may secure your health from injury. In the midst of what I have suffered I have been thankful that you did not share a scene of distress which you could not have relieved. I have supported myself, but I am sure, had we been together, we should have suffered more.

" With regard to my brother's kindness, I can scarcely express to you how great it has been. He saw my father while he was still sensible, and never quitted him till the awful moment was past—I will not now dwell on particulars. My mind is not sufficiently recovered to enter on the subject, and you could only be distressed by it. He returns soon to Margate to pay the last duties in the manner desired by my father. His feelings have been severely tried, and earnestly I pray he may not suffer from that cause, or

from the fatigue he has endured. His tenderness to me I never can forget. I had so little claim on him, that I still feel a degree of surprise mixed with my gratitude. Mrs. Sheridan's reception of me was truly affectionate. They leave me to myself now as much as I please, as I had gone through so much fatigue of body and mind that I require some rest. I have not, as you may suppose, looked much beyond the present hour, but I begin to be more composed. I could now enjoy your society, and I wish for it hourly. I should think I may hope to see you sooner in England than you had intended; but you will write to me very soon, and let me know every thing that concerns you. I know not whether you will feel like me a melancholy pleasure in the reflection that my father received the last kind offices from my brother Richard *, whose conduct on this occasion must convince every one of the goodness of his heart and the truth of his filial affection. One more reflection

* In a letter, from which I have given an extract in the former volume, written by the elder sister of Sheridan a short time after his death, in referring to the differences that existed between him and his father, she says—" and yet it was that son, and not the object of his partial fondness, who at last closed his eyes." It generally happens that the injustice of such partialities is revenged by the ingratitude of those who are the objects of them; and the present instance, as there is but too much reason to believe, was not altogether an exception to the remark.

CHAP. XII.

1788.

of consolation is, that nothing was omitted that could have prolonged his life or eased his latter hours. God bless and preserve you, my dear love. I shall soon write more to you, but shall for a short time suspend my journal, as still too many painful thoughts will crowd upon me to suffer me to regain such a frame of mind as I should wish when I write to you.

" Ever affectionately your

" E. SHERIDAN."

In another letter, dated a few days after, she gives an account of the domestic life of Mrs. Sheridan, which, like every thing that is related of that most interesting woman, excites a feeling towards her memory, little short of love.

" Dibden, Friday, 22.

" MY DEAR LOVE,

" I shall endeavour to resume my journal, though my anxiety to hear from you occupies my mind in a way that unfits me for writing. I have been here almost a week in perfect quiet. While there was company in the house, I stayed in my room, and since my brother's leaving us to go to Margate, I have sat at times with Mrs. Sheridan, who is kind and considerate; so that I have entire liberty. Her poor sister's * children

* Mrs. Tickell.

are all with her. The girl gives her constant employment, and seems to profit by being under so good an instructor. Their father was here for some days, but I did not see him. Last night Mrs. S. showed me a picture of Mrs. Tickell, which she wears round her neck. The thing was misrepresented to you:—it was not done after her death, but a short time before it. The sketch was taken while she slept, by a painter at Bristol. This Mrs. Sheridan got copied by Cosway, who has softened down the traces of illness in such a way that the picture conveys no gloomy idea. It represents her in a sweet sleep; which must have been soothing to her friend, after seeing her for a length of time in a state of constant suffering.

"My brother left us Wednesday morning, and we do not expect him to return for some days. He meant only to stay at Margate long enough to attend the last melancholy office, which it was my poor father's express desire should be performed in whatever parish he died.

* * * * *

"Sunday.

"Dick is still in town, and we do not expect him for some time. Mrs. Sheridan seems now quite reconciled to these little absences, which

CHAP. XII.

1788.

she knows are unavoidable. I never saw any one so constant in employing every moment of her time, and to that I attribute, in a great measure, the recovery of her health and spirits. The education of her niece, her music, books, and work, occupy every minute of the day. After dinner, the children, who call her 'Mamma-aunt,' spend some time with us, and her manner to them is truly delightful. The girl, you know, is the eldest. The eldest boy is about five years old, very like his father, but extremely gentle in his manners. The youngest is past three. The whole set then retire to the music-room. As yet I cannot enjoy their parties;—a song from Mrs. Sheridan affected me last night in a most painful manner. I shall not try the experiment soon again. Mrs. S. blamed herself for putting me to the trial, and, after tea, got a book, which she read to us till supper. This, I find, is the general way of passing the evening.

"They are now at their music, and I have retired to add a few lines. This day has been more gloomy than we have been for some days past;—it is the first day of our getting into mourning. All the servants in deep mourning made a melancholy appearance, and I found it very difficult to sit out the dinner. But, as I have dined below since there has been only Mrs.

Sheridan and Miss Linley here, I would not suffer a circumstance, to which I must accustom myself, to break in on their comfort."

These children, to whom Mrs. Sheridan thus wholly devoted herself, and continued to do so for the remainder of her life, had lost their mother, Mrs. Tickell, in the year 1787, by the same complaint that afterwards proved fatal to their aunt. The passionate attachment of Mrs. Sheridan to this sister, and the deep grief with which she mourned her loss, are expressed in a poem of her own so touchingly, that, to those who love the language of real feeling, I need not apologise for their introduction here. Poetry, in general, is but a cold interpreter of sorrow; and the more it displays its skill, as an art, the less it is likely to do justice to nature. In writing these verses, however, the workmanship was forgotten in the subject; and the critic, to feel them as he ought, should forget his own craft in reading them.

"*Written in the Spring of the Year* 1788.

"The hours and days pass on;—sweet Spring returns,
And whispers comfort to the heart that mourns;
But not to mine, whose dear and cherish'd grief
Asks for indulgence, but ne'er hopes relief.
For, ah, can changing seasons e'er restore
The lov'd companion I must still deplore?

CHAP. XII.

1788.

Shall all the wisdom of the world combin'd
Erase thy image, Mary, from my mind,
Or bid me hope from others to receive
The fond affection thou alone could'st give?
Ah no, my best belov'd, thou still shalt be
My friend, my sister, all the world to me.
" With tender woe sad memory woos back time,
And paints the scenes when youth was in its prime;
The craggy hill, where rocks, with wild flow'rs crown'd,
Burst from the hazel copse or verdant ground;
Where sportive Nature every form assumes,
And, gaily lavish, wastes a thousand blooms;
Where oft we heard the echoing hills repeat
Our untaught strains and rural ditties sweet,
Till purpling clouds proclaim'd the closing day,
While distant streams detain'd the parting ray.
Then, on some mossy stone we'd sit us down,
And watch the changing sky and shadows brown,
That swiftly glided o'er the mead below,
Or in some fancied form descended slow.
How oft, well pleas'd each other to adorn,
We stripp'd the blossoms from the fragrant thorn,
Or caught the violet where, in humble bed,
Asham'd of its own sweets it hung its head.
But, oh, what rapture Mary's eyes would speak,
Through her dark hair how rosy glow'd her cheek,
If, in her playful search, she saw appear
The first-blown cowslip of the opening year.
Thy gales, oh Spring, then whisper'd life and joy;—
Now mem'ry wakes thy pleasures to destroy,
And all thy beauties serve but to renew
Regrets too keen for reason to subdue.
Ah me! while tender recollections rise,
The ready tears obscure my sadden'd eyes,

And, while surrounding objects they conceal,
Her form belov'd the trembling drops reveal.
" Sometimes the lovely, blooming girl I view,
My youth's companion, friend for ever true,
Whose looks, the sweet expressions of a heart
So gaily innocent, so void of art,
With soft attraction whisper'd blessings drew
From all who stopp'd, her beauteous face to view.
Then, in the dear domestic scene I mourn,
And weep past pleasures never to return!
There, where each gentle virtue lov'd to rest,
In the pure mansion of my Mary's breast,
The days of social happiness are o'er,
The voice of harmony is heard no more;
No more her graceful tenderness shall prove
The wife's fond duty or the parent's love.
Those eyes which brighten'd with maternal pride,
As her sweet infants wanton'd by her side,
'Twas my sad fate to see for ever close
On life, on love, the world, and all its woes;
To watch the slow disease, with hopeless care,
And veil in painful smiles my heart's despair;
To see her droop, with restless languor weak,
While fatal beauty mantled in her cheek,
Like fresh flow'rs, springing from some mouldering clay,
Cherish'd by death, and blooming from decay.
Yet, though oppress'd by ever-varying pain,
The gentle sufferer scarcely would complain,
Hid every sigh, each trembling doubt reprov'd,
To spare a pang to those fond hearts she lov'd.
And often, in short intervals of ease,
Her kind and cheerful spirit strove to please;
Whilst we, alas! unable to refuse
The sad delight we were so soon to lose,

CHAP. XII.

1788.

Treasur'd each word, each kind expression claim'd,—
' 'Twas me she look'd at,'—' it was me she nam'd.'
Thus fondly soothing grief, too great to bear,
With mournful eagerness and jealous care.
" But soon, alas! from hearts with sorrow worn
Ev'n this last comfort was for ever torn:
That mind, the seat of wisdom, genius, taste,
The cruel hand of sickness now laid waste;
Subdued with pain, it shar'd the common lot,
All, all its lovely energies forgot!
The husband, parent, sister, knelt in vain,
One recollecting look alone to gain:
The shades of night her beaming eyes obscur'd,
And Nature, vanquish'd, no sharp pain endur'd;
Calm and serene—till the last trembling breath
Wafted an angel from the bed of death!
Oh, if the soul, releas'd from mortal cares,
Views the sad scene, the voice of mourning hears,
Then, dearest saint, didst thou thy heav'n forego,
Lingering on earth in pity to our woe.
'Twas thy kind influence sooth'd our minds to peace,
And bade our vain and selfish murmurs cease;
'Twas thy soft smile, that gave the worshipp'd clay
Of thy bright essence one celestial ray,
Making e'en death so beautiful, that we,
Gazing on it, forgot our misery.
Then—pleasing thought!—ere to the realms of light
Thy franchis'd spirit took its happy flight,
With fond regard, perhaps, thou saw'st me bend
O'er the cold relics of my heart's best friend,
And heard'st me swear, while her dear hand I prest,
And tears of agony bedew'd my breast,
For her lov'd sake to act the mother's part,
And take her darling infants to my heart,

With tenderest care their youthful minds improve,
And guard her treasure with protecting love.
Once more look down, blest creature, and behold
These arms the precious innocents enfold;
Assist my erring nature to fulfil
The sacred trust, and ward off every ill!
And, oh, let *her*, who is my dearest care,
Thy blest regard and heavenly influence share;
Teach me to form her pure and artless mind,
Like thine, as true, as innocent, as kind,
That when some future day my hopes shall bless,
And every voice her virtue shall confess,
When my fond heart delighted hears her praise,
As with unconscious loveliness she strays,
'Such,' let me say, with tears of joy the while,
'Such was the softness of my Mary's smile;
'Such was *her* youth, so blithe, so rosy sweet,
'And such *her* mind, unpractis'd in deceit;
'With artless elegance, unstudied grace,
'Thus did *she* gain in every heart a place!'
"Then, while the dear remembrance I behold,
Time shall steal on, nor tell me I am old,
Till, nature wearied, each fond duty o'er,
I join my Angel Friend—to part no more!"

To the conduct of Mr. Sheridan, during the last moments of his father, a further testimony has been kindly communicated to me by Mr. Jarvis, a medical gentleman of Margate, who attended Mr. Thomas Sheridan on that occasion, and whose interesting communication I shall here give in his own words:—

CHAP. XII.

1788.

"On the 10th of August, 1788, I was first called on to visit Mr. Sheridan, who was then fast declining at his lodgings in this place, where he was in the care of his daughter. On the next day Mr. R. B. Sheridan arrived here from town, having brought with him Dr. Morris, of Parliament Street. I was in the bed-room with Mr. Sheridan when the son arrived, and witnessed an interview in which the father showed himself to be strongly impressed by his son's attention, saying, with considerable emotion, 'Oh Dick, I give you a great deal of trouble!' and seeming to imply by his manner, that his son had been less to blame than himself, for any previous want of cordiality between them.

"On my making my last call for the evening, Mr. R. B. Sheridan, with delicacy, but much earnestness, expressed his fear that the nurse in attendance on his father might not be so competent as myself to the requisite attentions, and his hope that I would consent to remain in the room for a few of the first hours of the night; as he himself, having been travelling the preceding night, required some short repose. I complied with his request, and remained at the father's bedside till relieved by the son, about three o'clock in the morning;—he then insisted on taking my place. From this time he never quitted the house till his father's death; on the

day after which he wrote me a letter, now before me, of which the annexed is an exact copy:.

'SIR, Friday Morning.

'I wished to see you this morning before I went, to thank you for your attention and trouble. You will be so good to give the account to Mr. Thompson, who will settle it; and I must further beg your acceptance of the inclosed from myself. I am, Sir,

'Your obedient Servant,

'R. B. SHERIDAN.'

'I have explained to Dr. Morris (who has informed me that you will recommend a proper person,) that it is my desire to have the hearse, and the manner of coming to town, as respectful as possible.'

"The inclosure, referred to in this letter, was a bank-note of ten pounds,—a most liberal remuneration. Mr. R. B. Sheridan left Margate, intending that his father should be buried in London; but he there ascertained that it had been his father's expressed wish, that he should be buried in the parish next to that in which he should happen to die. He then, consequently, returned to Margate, accompanied by his brother-in-law, Mr. Tickell, with whom and Mr. Thompson and myself he followed his father's

CHAP. XII.

1788.

remains to the burial-place, which was not in Margate church-yard, but in the north aisle of the church at St. Peter's."

Mr. Jarvis, the writer of the letter from which I have given this extract, had once, as he informs me, the intention of having a cenotaph raised, to the memory of Mr. Sheridan's father, in the church of Margate.* With this view he applied to Dr. Parr for an Inscription, and the following is the tribute to his old friend with which that learned and kind-hearted man supplied him :—

" This monument, A. D. 1824, was, by subscription, erected to the memory of Thomas Sheridan, Esq., who died in the neighbouring parish of St. John, August 14, 1788, in the 69th year of his age, and, according to his own request, was there buried. He was grandson to Dr. Thomas Sheridan, the brother of Dr. William, a conscientious non-juror, who, in 1691, was deprived of the Bishopric of Kilmore. He was the son of Dr. Thomas Sheridan, a profound scholar and eminent schoolmaster, intimately connected with Dean Swift and other illustrious writers in the reign of Queen Anne. He was husband to the ingenious and amiable author of Sidney

* Though this idea was relinquished, it appears that a friend of Mr. Jarvis, with a zeal for the memory of talent highly honourable to him, has recently caused a monument to Mr. Thomas Sheridan to be raised in the church of St. Peter.

Biddulph and several dramatic pieces favourably received. He was father of the celebrated orator and dramatist Richard Brinsley Sheridan. He had been the schoolfellow, and, through life, was the companion, of the amiable Archbishop Markham. He was the friend of the learned Dr. Sumner, master of Harrow School, and the well-known Dr. Parr. He took his first academical degree in the University of Dublin, about 1736. He was honored by the University of Oxford with the degree of A. M. in 1758, and in 1759 he obtained the same distinction at Cambridge. He, for many years, presided over the theatre of Dublin; and, at Drury Lane, he in public estimation stood next to David Garrick. In the literary world he was distinguished by numerous and useful writings on the pronunciation of the English language. Through some of his opinions ran a vein of singularity, mingled with the rich ore of genius. In his manners there was dignified ease; — in his spirit, invincible firmness; — and in his habits and principles, unsullied integrity."

CHAP. XIII.

1788.

CHAP. XIII.

ILLNESS OF THE KING. — REGENCY. — PRIVATE LIFE OF MR. SHERIDAN.

MR. SHERIDAN had assuredly no reason to complain of any deficiency of excitement in the new career to which he now devoted himself. A succession of great questions, both foreign and domestic, came, one after the other, like the waves described by the poet, —

" And one no sooner touch'd the shore, and died,
Than a new follower rose, and swell'd as proudly."

Scarcely had the impulse, which his own genius had given to the prosecution of Hastings, begun to abate, when the indisposition of the King opened another field, not only for the display of all his various powers, but for the fondest speculations of his interest and ambition.

The robust health and temperate habits of the Monarch, while they held out the temptation of a long lease of power, to those who either enjoyed or were inclined to speculate in his favour, gave proportionably the grace of disinterested-

ness to the followers of an Heir-Apparent, whose means of rewarding their devotion were, from the same causes, uncertain and remote. The alarming illness of the Monarch, however, gave a new turn to the prospect:—Hope was now seen, like the winged Victory of the ancients, to change sides; and both the expectations of those who looked forward to the reign of the Prince, as the great and happy millennium of Whiggism, and the apprehensions of the far greater number, to whom the morals of his Royal Highness and his friends were not less formidable than their politics, seemed now on the very eve of being realised.

On the first meeting of Parliament, after the illness of His Majesty was known, it was resolved, from considerations of delicacy, that the House should adjourn for a fortnight; at the end of which period it was expected that another short adjournment would be proposed by the Minister. In this interval, the following judicious letter was addressed to the Prince of Wales by Mr. Sheridan:—

"Sir,

"From the intelligence of to-day we are led to think that Pitt will make something more of a speech, in moving to adjourn on Thursday, than was at first imagined. In this case we pre-

CHAP. XIII. 1788.

sume Your Royal Highness will be of opinion that we must not be wholly silent. I possessed Payne yesterday with my sentiments on the line of conduct which appeared to me best to be adopted on this occasion, that they might be submitted to Your Royal Highness's consideration; and I take the liberty of repeating my firm conviction, that it will greatly advance Your Royal Highness's credit, and, in case of events, lay the strongest grounds to baffle every attempt at opposition to Your Royal Highness's just claims and right, that the language of those who may be, in any sort, suspected of knowing Your Royal Highness's wishes and feelings, should be that of great moderation in disclaiming all party views, and avowing the utmost readiness to acquiesce in any reasonable delay. At the same time, I am perfectly aware of the arts which will be practised, and the advantages which some people will attempt to gain by time: but I am equally convinced that we should advance their evil views by showing the least impatience or suspicion at present; and I am also convinced that a third party will soon appear, whose efforts may, in the most decisive manner, prevent this sort of situation and proceeding from continuing long. Payne will probably have submitted to Your Royal Highness more fully my idea on this subject, towards which I

have already taken some successful steps.* Your Royal Highness will, I am sure, have the goodness to pardon the freedom with which I give my opinion; — after which I have only to add, that whatever Your Royal Highness's judgment decides, shall be the pride of my conduct, and will undoubtedly be so to others."

Captain (afterwards Admiral) Payne, of whom mention is made in this letter, held the situation of Comptroller of the Household of the Prince of Wales, and was in attendance upon His Royal Highness, during the early part of the King's illness, at Windsor. The following letters, addressed by him to Mr. Sheridan at this period, contain some curious particulars, both with respect to the Royal patient himself, and the feelings of those about him, which, however secret and confidential they were at the time, may now, without scruple, be made matters of history: —

" Half past ten at night.

" My dear Sheridan,

" I arrived here about three quarters of an hour after Pitt had left it. I enclose you the copy of a letter the Prince has just written to

* This must allude to the negotiation with Lord Thurlow.

CHAP. XIII.

1788.

the Chancellor, and sent by express, which will give you the outline of the conversation with the Prince, as well as the situation of the King's health. I think it an advisable measure *, as it is a sword that cuts both ways, without being unfit to be shown to whom he pleases, — but which he will, I think, understand best himself. Pitt desired the longest delay that could be granted with propriety, previous to the declaration of the present calamity. The Duke of York, who is looking over me, and is just come out of the king's room, bids me add that His Majesty's situation is every moment becoming worse. His pulse is weaker and weaker; and the Doctors say it is impossible to survive it long, if his situation does not take some *extraordinary* change in a few hours.

" So far had I got when your servant came, meaning to send this by the express that carried the Chancellor's letter; in addition to which, the Prince has desired Doctor Warren to write an account to him, which he is now doing. His letter says, if an amendment does not take place in twenty-four hours, it is impossible for the King to support it: — he adds to me, he will answer for his never living to be declared a lunatic. I say all this to you in confidence, (though

* Meaning, the communication to the Chancellor.

I will not answer for being intelligible,) as it goes by your own servant; but I need not add, your own discretion will remind you how necessary it is that neither my name nor those I use should be quoted even to many of our best friends, whose repetition, without any ill intention, might frustrate views they do not see.

"With respect to the papers, the Prince thinks you had better leave them to themselves, as we cannot authorise any report, nor can he contradict the worst;—a few hours must, every individual says, terminate our suspense, and, therefore, all precaution must be needless:—however, do what you think best. His Royal Highness would write to you himself;—the agitation he is in will not permit it. Since this letter was begun, all articulation even seems to be at an end with the poor King; but for the two hours preceding, he was in a most determined frenzy. In short, I am myself in so violent a state of agitation, from participating in the feelings of those about me, that if I am intelligible to you, 'tis more than I am to myself. Cataplasms are on His Majesty's feet, and strong fomentations have been used without effect: but let me quit so painful a subject. The Prince was much pleased with my conversation with Lord Loughborough, to whom I do not write, as I conceive 'tis the same, writing to you.

CHAP. XIII.

1788.

"The Archbishop has written a very handsome letter, expressive of his duty and offer of service; but he is not required to come down, it being thought too late.

"Good night. — I will write upon every occasion that information may be useful.

"Ever yours, most sincerely,

"J. W. PAYNE.

"I have been much pleased with the *Duke*'s zeal since my return, especially in this communication to you."

"DEAR SHERIDAN, Twelve o'clock, noon.

"The King last night about twelve o'clock, being then in a situation he could not long have survived, by the effect of James's powder, had a profuse stool, after which a strong perspiration appeared, and he fell into a profound sleep. We were in hopes this was the crisis of his disorder, although the doctors were fearful it was so only with respect to one part of his disorder. However, these hopes continued not above an hour, when he awoke, with a well-conditioned skin, no extraordinary degree of fever, but with the exact state he was in before, with all the gestures and ravings of the most confirmed maniac, and a new noise, in imitation of the howling of a dog; in this situation he was this morning at one o'clock, when we came to bed. The Duke of York, who

has been twice in my room in the course of the night, immediately from the King's apartment, says there has not been one moment of lucid interval during the whole night, — which, I must observe to you, is the concurring, as well as *fatal* testimony of all about him, from the first moment of His Majesty's confinement. The doctors have since had their consultation, and find His Majesty calmer, and his pulse tolerably good and much reduced, but the most decided symptoms of insanity. His theme has been all this day on the subject of religion, and of his being inspired, from which his physicians draw the worst consequences, as to any hopes of amendment. In this situation His Majesty remains at the present moment, which I give you at length, to prevent your giving credit to the thousand ridiculous reports that we hear, even upon the spot. Truth is not easily got at in palaces, and so I find here; and time only slowly brings it to one's knowledge. One hears a little bit every day from somebody, that has been reserved with great costiveness, or purposely forgotten; and by all such accounts I find that the present distemper has been very palpable for some time past, previous to any confinement from sickness; and so apprehensive have the people about him been of giving offence by interruption, that the two days (viz. yesterday se'nnight and the Monday following)

CHAP. XIII.

1788.

that he was five hours each on horseback, he was in a confirmed frenzy. On the Monday at his return he burst out into tears to the Duke of York, and said, 'He wished to God he might die, for he was going to be mad;' and the Queen, who sent to Dr. Warren, on his arrival, privately communicated her knowledge of his situation for some time past, and the melancholy event as it stood exposed. I am prolix upon all these different reports, that you may be completely master of the subject as it stands, and which I shall continue to advertise you of in all its variations. Warren, who is the living principle in this business, (for poor Baker is half crazed himself,) and who I see every half hour, is extremely attentive to the King's disorder. The various fluctuations of his ravings, as well as general situation of his health, are accurately written down throughout the day, and this we have got signed by the Physicians every day, and all proper enquiry invited; for I think it necessary to do every thing that may prevent *their* making use hereafter of any thing like jealousy, suspicion, or mystery, to create public distrust; and, therefore, the best and most unequivocal means of satisfaction shall be always attended to.

"Five o'clock, P. M.

"So far I had proceeded when I was, on some business of importance, obliged to break off till

now; and, on my return, found your letter; — I need not, I hope, say your confidence is as safe as if it was returned to your own mind, and your advice will always be thankfully adopted. The event we looked for last night is postponed, perhaps for a short time, so that, at least, we shall have time to consider more maturely. The Doctors told Pitt they would beg not to be obliged to make their declaration for a fortnight, as to the incurability of the King's mind, and not to be surprised if, at the expiration of that time, they should ask more time; but that they were perfectly ready to declare now, for the furtherance of public business, that he is now insane; that it appears to be unconnected with any other disease of his body, and that they have tried all their skill without effect, and that to the *disease they at present see no end in their contemplation:* — these are their own words, which is all that can be implied in an absolute declaration, — for infallibility cannot be ascribed to them.

"Should not something be done about the public amusements? If it was represented to Pitt, it might embarrass them either way; particularly as it might call for a public account every day. I think the Chancellor might take a good opportunity to break with his colleagues, if they propose restriction: the Law authority would

CHAP. XIII.

1788.

have great weight with us, as well as preventing even a design of moving the City;—at all events, I think Parliament would not confirm their opinion. If Pitt stirs much, I think any attempt to *grasp at power* might be fatal to his interest, at least, well turned against it.

"The Prince has sent for me directly, so I'll send this now, and write again."

In the words, "I think the Chancellor might take a good opportunity to break with his colleagues," the writer alludes to a negotiation which Sheridan had entered into with Lord Thurlow, and by which it was expected that the co-operation of that Learned Lord might be secured, in consideration of his being allowed to retain the office of Chancellor under the Regency.

Lord Thurlow was one of those persons who, being taken by the world at their own estimate of themselves, contrive to pass upon the times in which they live for much more than they are worth. His bluntness gained him credit for superior honesty, and the same peculiarity of exterior gave a weight, not their own, to his talents;—the roughness of the diamond being, by a very common mistake, made the measure of its value. The negotiation for his alliance on this occasion was managed, if not first suggested,

by Sheridan; and Mr. Fox, on his arrival from the Continent (having been sent for express upon the first announcement of the King's illness), found considerable progress already made in the preliminaries of this heterogeneous compact.

The following letter from Admiral Payne, written immediately after the return of Mr. Fox, contains some further allusions to the negotiations with the Chancellor:—

"My dear Sheridan,

"I am this moment returned with the Prince from riding, and heard, with great pleasure, of Charles Fox's arrival; on which account, he says, I must go to town to-morrow, when I hope to meet you at his house some time before dinner. The Prince is to see the Chancellor to-morrow, and therefore he wishes I should be able to carry to town the result of this interview, or I would set off immediately. Due deference is had to our *former opinion* upon this subject, and no courtship will be practised; for the chief object in the visit is to show him the King, who has been worse the two last days than ever: this morning he made an effort to jump out of the window, and is now very turbulent and incoherent. Sir G. Baker went yesterday to give Pitt a little specimen of his loquacity, in his dis-

CHAP. XIII.

1788.

covery of some material state-secrets, at which he looked astonished. The Physicians wish him to be removed to Kew; on which we shall proceed as we settled. Have you heard any thing of the Foreign Ministers, respecting what the P. said at Bagshot? The Frenchman has been here two days running, but has not seen the Prince. He sat with me half an hour this morning, and seemed much disposed to confer a little closely. He was all admiration and friendship for the Prince, and said he was sure *every body* would unite to give vigour to his government.

"To-morrow you shall hear particulars; in the mean time I can only add I have none of the apprehensions contained in Lord L.'s letter. I have had correspondence enough myself on this subject to convince me of the impossibility of the Ministry managing the present Parliament by any contrivance hostile to the Prince. Dinner is on table; so adieu; and be assured of the truth and sincerity of

"Yours affectionately,

"*Windsor, Monday, 5 o'clock, P. M.* J. W. P.

"I have just got Rodney's proxy sent."

The situation in which Mr. Fox was placed, by the treaty thus commenced, before his arrival, with the Chancellor, was not a little embarrassing. In addition to the distaste which he must

have felt for such a union, he had been already, it appears, in some degree pledged to bestow the Great Seal, in the event of a change, upon Lord Loughborough. Finding, however, the Prince and his party so far committed in the negotiation with Lord Thurlow, he thought it expedient, however contrary to his own wishes, to accede to their views; and a letter, addressed by him to Mr. Sheridan on the occasion, shows the struggle with his own feelings and opinions which this concession cost him:—

"DEAR SHERIDAN,

"I have swallowed the pill,—a most bitter one it was,—and have written to Lord Loughborough, whose answer of course must be consent. What is to be done next? Should the Prince himself, you or I, or Warren, be the person to speak to the Chancellor? The objection to the last is, that he must probably wait for an opportunity, and that no time is to be lost. Pray tell me what is to be done: I am convinced, after all, the negotiation will not succeed, and am not sure that I am sorry for it. I do not remember ever feeling so uneasy about any political thing I ever did in my life. Call if you can.

"Yours ever,

"*Sat. past* 12. C. J. F."

CHAP. XIII.

1788.

Lord Loughborough, in the mean time, with a vigilance quickened by his own personal views, kept watch on the mysterious movements of the Chancellor; and, as appears by the following letter, not only saw reason to suspect duplicity himself, but took care that Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan should share in his distrust:—

"My dear S.,

"I was afraid to pursue the conversation on the circumstance of the Inspection committed to the Chancellor, lest the reflections that arise upon it might have made too strong an impression on some of our neighbours last night. It does indeed appear to me full of mischief, and of that sort most likely to affect the apprehensions of our best friends, (of Lord John for instance,) and to increase their reluctance to take any active part.

"The Chancellor's object evidently is to make his way by himself, and he has managed hitherto as one very well practised in that game. His conversations, both with you and Mr. Fox, were encouraging, but at the same time checked all explanations on his part, under a pretence of delicacy towards his colleagues. When he let them go to Salthill, and contrived to dine at Windsor*,

* On one occasion, during these manœuvres of the Chancellor at Windsor, he betrayed (to the no small amusement

he certainly took a step that most men would have felt not very delicate in its appearance, and, unless there was some private understanding between him and them, not altogether fair; especially if you add to it the sort of conversation he held with regard to them. I cannot help thinking that the difficulties of managing the patient have been excited or improved to lead to the proposal of his inspection, (without the Prince being conscious of it,) for by that situation he gains an easy and frequent access to him, and an opportunity of possessing the confidence of the Queen. I believe this the more from the account of the tenderness he showed at his first interview, for, I am sure, it is not in his character to feel any. With a little instruction from Lord Hawksbury, the sort of management that was carried on by means of the Princess-Dowager, in the early part of the reign, may easily be practised. In short, I think he will try to find the key of the back stairs, and, with that in his pocket, take any situation that preserves his access, and enables him to hold a line between different parties. In the present moment, however, he has taken a

---

of his colleagues) the secret of an interview which he had just had with the Prince, by coming to the Council with His Royal Highness's hat in his hand, instead of his own.

CHAP. XIII. 1788.

position that puts the command of the House of Lords in his hands, for * * *.†

"I wish Mr. Fox and you would give these considerations what weight you think they deserve, and try if any means can be taken to remedy this mischief, if it appears in the same light to you.

"Ever yours, &c."

What were the motives that induced Lord Thurlow to break off so suddenly his negotiation with the Prince's party, and declare himself with such vehemence on the side of the King and Mr. Pitt, it does not appear very easy to ascertain. Possibly, from his opportunities of visiting the Royal Patient, he had been led to conceive sufficient hopes of recovery, to incline the balance of his speculation that way; or, perhaps, in the influence of Lord Loughborough‡ over Mr. Fox, he saw a risk of being supplanted in his views on the Great Seal. Whatever may have been the motive, it is certain that his negotiation with the Whigs had been amicably car-

† The remainder of this sentence is effaced by damp.

‡ Lord Loughborough is supposed to have been the person who instilled into the mind of Mr. Fox the idea of advancing that claim of Right for the Prince, which gave Mr. Pitt, in principle as well as in fact, such an advantage over him.

ried on, till within a few hours of his delivery of that speech, from whose enthusiasm the public could little suspect how fresh from the incomplete bargain of defection was the speaker, and in the course of which he gave vent to the well-known declaration, that "his debt of gratitude to His Majesty was ample, for the many favours he had graciously conferred upon him, which when he forgot, might God forget him!"*

As it is not my desire to imitate those biographers who swell their pages with details that belong more properly to History, I shall forbear to enter into a minute or consecutive narrative of the proceedings of Parliament on the important subject of the Regency. A writer of political biography has a right, no doubt, like an engineer who constructs a navigable canal, to lay every brook and spring in the neighbourhood under contribution for the supply and enrichment of his work. But, to turn into it the whole contents of the Annual Register and Parliamentary Debates is a sort of literary engineering, not quite so laudable, which, after the example set by a Right Reverend biographer of Mr. Pitt, will hardly again be attempted by any one, whose ambition, at least, it is to be read as well as bought.

* "Forget you!" said Wilkes, "he'll see you d—d first."

CHAP. XIII.

1788.

Mr. Fox and Mr. Pitt, it is well known, differed essentially, not only with respect to the form of the proceedings, which the latter recommended in that suspension of the Royal authority, but also with respect to the abstract constitutional principles, upon which those proceedings of the Minister were professedly founded. As soon as the nature of the malady, with which the King was afflicted, had been ascertained by a regular examination of the physicians in attendance on His Majesty, Mr. Pitt moved (on the 10th of December), that a "Committee be appointed to examine and report precedents of such proceedings as may have been had, in case of the personal exercise of the Royal authority being prevented or interrupted, by infancy, sickness, infirmity, or otherwise, with a view to provide for the same."*

* Mr. Burke and Mr. Sheridan were both members of this Committee, and the following letter from the former to Sheridan refers to it:—

"My dear Sir,

"My idea was, that on Fox's declaring that the precedents, neither individually nor collectively, do at all apply, our attendance ought to have been merely formal. But as you think otherwise, I shall certainly be at the Committee soon after one. I rather think, that they will not attempt to garble: because, supposing the precedents to apply, the

It was immediately upon this motion that Mr. Fox advanced that inconsiderate claim of Right for the Prince of Wales, of which his rival availed himself so dexterously and triumphantly. Having asserted that there existed no precedent whatever that could bear upon the present case, Mr. Fox proceeded to say, that "the circumstance to be provided for did not depend upon their deliberations as a House of Parliament, — it rested elsewhere. There was then a person in the kingdom, different from any other person that any existing precedents could refer to, — an Heir Apparent, of full age and capacity to exercise the royal power. It behoved them, therefore, to waste not a moment unnecessarily, but to proceed with all becoming speed and diligence to restore the Sovereign power and the exercise of the Royal Authority. From what he had read of history, from the ideas he had formed of the law, and, what was still more precious, of the spirit of the Constitution, from every reasoning and analogy drawn from those sources, he declared that he had not in his mind

---

major part are certainly in their favour. It is not likely that they mean to suppress, — but it is good to be on our guard.

"Ever most truly yours, &c.

"EDMUND BURKE.

"*Gerard Street, Thursday Morning.*"

CHAP. XIII.

1788.

a doubt, and he should think himself culpable if he did not take the first opportunity of declaring it, that, in the present condition of His Majesty, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales had as clear, as express a Right to exercise the power of Sovereignty, during the continuance of the illness and incapacity, with which it had pleased God to afflict His Majesty, as in the case of His Majesty's having undergone a natural demise."

It is said that, during the delivery of this adventurous opinion, the countenance of Mr. Pitt was seen to brighten with exultation, at the mistake into which he perceived his adversary was hurrying; and scarcely had the sentence, just quoted, been concluded, when, slapping his thigh triumphantly, he turned to the person who sat next him, and said, "I'll *un-Whig* the gentleman for the rest of his life!"

Even without this anecdote, which may be depended upon as authentic, we have sufficient evidence that such were his feelings, in the burst of animation and confidence with which he instantly replied to Mr. Fox, — taking his ground, with an almost equal temerity, upon the directly opposite doctrine, and asserting, not only that "in the case of the interruption of the personal exercise of the Royal Authority it devolved upon the other branches of the Legislature to provide a substitute for that authority," but that "the

Prince of Wales had no more right to exercise the powers of government than any other person in the realm."

The truth is, the assertion of a *Right* was equally erroneous on both sides of the question. The Constitution having provided no legal remedy for such an exigence as had now occurred, the two houses of Parliament had as little right (in the strict sense of the word) to supply the deficiency of the Royal power, as the Prince had to be the person elected or adjudged for that purpose. Constitutional analogy and expediency were the only authorities, by which the measures, necessary in such a conjuncture, could be either guided or sanctioned; and if the disputants on each side had softened down their tone to this true and practical view of the case, there would have been no material difference, in the first stage of the proceedings, between them,—Mr. Pitt being ready to allow that the Heir Apparent was the obvious person, to whom expediency pointed as the depository of the Royal power, and Mr. Fox having granted, in a subsequent explanation of his doctrine, that, strong as was the right upon which the claim of the Prince was founded, His Royal Highness could not assume that right till it had been formally adjudicated to him by Parliament. The principle, however, having been imprudently broached,

Mr. Pitt was too expert a tactician not to avail himself of the advantage it gave him. He was thus, indeed, furnished with an opportunity, not only of gaining time by an artful protraction of the discussions, but of occupying victoriously the ground of Whiggism, which Mr. Fox had, in his impatience or precipitancy, deserted, and of thus adding to the character, which he had recently acquired, of a defender of the prerogatives of the Crown, the more brilliant reputation of an assertor of the rights of the People.

In the popular view which Mr. Pitt found it convenient to take of this question, he was led, or fell voluntarily, into some glaring errors, which pervaded the whole of his reasonings on the subject. In his anxiety to prove the omnipotence of Parliament, he evidently confounded the Estates of the realm with the Legislature *, and attributed to two branches of the latter such powers as are only legally possessed by the whole three in Parliament assembled. For the purpose, too, of flattering the people with the notion, that to them had now reverted the right of choosing their temporary Sovereign, he applied a principle, which ought to be reserved for extreme cases, to an exigence by no means re-

* Mr. Grattan and the Irish Parliament carried this error still farther, and founded all their proceedings on the necessity of "providing for the deficiency of the Third *Estate*."

quiring this ultimate appeal, — the defect in the government being such as the still existing Estates of the realm, appointed to speak the will of the people, but superseding any direct exercise of their power, were fully competent, as in the instance of the Revolution, to remedy.*

The solemn use of such language as Mr. Pitt, in his over-acted Whiggism, employed upon this occasion, — namely, that the "right" of appointing a substitute for the Royal power was "to be found in the voice and the sense of the people" — is applicable only to those conjunctures, brought on by misrule and oppression, when all forms are lost in the necessity of relief, and when the right of the people to change and choose their rulers is among the most sacred and inalienable that either nature or social polity has ordained. But, to apply the language of that last resource to the present emergency was to brandish the sword of Goliath † on an occasion that by no means called for it.

The question of the Prince's claim, — in spite

* The most luminous view that has been taken of this Question is to be found in an Article of the Edinburgh Review, on the Regency of 1811, — written by one of the most learned and able men of our day, Mr. John Allen.

† A simile applied by Lord Somers to the power of Impeachment, which, he said, "should be like Goliath's sword, kept in the temple, and not used but upon great occasions."

CHAP. XIII. 1789.

of the efforts of the Prince himself and of his royal relatives to avert the agitation of it,—was, for evident reasons, forced into discussion by the Minister, and decided by a majority, not only of the two Houses but of the nation, in his favour. During one of the long debates to which the question gave rise, Mr. Sheridan allowed himself to be betrayed into some expressions, which, considering the delicate predicament in which the Prince was placed by the controversy, were not marked with his usual tact and sagacity. In alluding to the claim of Right advanced for His Royal Highness, and deprecating any further agitation of it, he " reminded the Right Honourable Gentleman (Mr. Pitt) of the danger of provoking that claim to be asserted [a loud cry of hear! hear!], which, he observed, had not yet been preferred. [Another cry of hear! hear!]" This was the very language that Mr. Pitt most wished his adversaries to assume, and, accordingly he turned it to account with all his usual mastery and haughtiness. " He had now," he said, " an additional reason for asserting the authority of the House, and defining the boundaries of Right, when the deliberative faculties of Parliament were invaded, and an indecent menace thrown out to awe and influence their proceedings. In the discussion of the question, the House, he trusted, would do their duty, in spite

of any threat that might be thrown out. Men, who felt their native freedom, would not submit to a threat, however high the authority from which it might come."*

The restrictions of the Prerogative with which Mr. Pitt thought proper to encumber the transfer of the Royal power to the Prince, formed the second great point of discussion between the parties, and brought equally adverse principles into play. Mr. Fox, still maintaining his position on the side of Royalty, defended it with much more tenable weapons than the question of Right had enabled him to wield. So founded, indeed, in the purest principles of Whiggism did he consider his opposition, on this memorable occasion, to any limitation of the Prerogative in the hands of a Regent, that he has, in his History of James II., put those principles deliberately upon record, as a fundamental article in the creed of his party. The passage to which I allude occurs in his remarks upon the Exclusion Bill; and as it contains, in a condensed form, the spirit of what he urged on the same point in 1789, I cannot do better than lay his own words before the reader. After expressing his opinion that, at the period of which he writes, the measure of exclusion from the monarchy altogether

* *Impartial Report of all the Proceedings on the Subject of the Regency.*

CHAP. XIII. 1789.

would have been preferable to any limitation of its powers, he proceeds to say: — "The Whigs, who consider the powers of the Crown as a trust for the people, a doctrine which the Tories themselves, when pushed in argument, will sometimes admit, naturally think it their duty rather to change the manager of the trust than impair the subject of it; while others, who consider them as the right or property of the King, will as naturally act as they would do in the case of any other property, and consent to the loss or annihilation of any part of it, for the purpose of preserving the remainder to him, whom they style the rightful owner." Further on he adds; — "The Royal Prerogative ought, according to the Whigs, to be reduced to such powers as are in their exercise beneficial to the people; and of the benefit of these they will not rashly suffer the people to be deprived, whether the executive power be in the hands of an hereditary or of an elective King, of a Regent, or of any other denomination of magistrate; while, on the other hand, they who consider Prerogative with reference only to Royalty will, with equal readiness, consent either to the extension or the suspension of its exercise, as the occasional interests of the Prince may seem to require."

Taking this as a correct exposition of the doctrines of the two parties, of which Mr. Fox and

Mr. Pitt may be considered to have been the representatives in the Regency question of 1789, it will strike some minds, that however the Whig may flatter himself that the principle by which he is guided in such exigencies is favourable to liberty, and however the Tory may, with equal sincerity, believe his suspension of the Prerogative on these occasions to be advantageous to the Crown, yet that in both of the principles, so defined, there is an evident tendency to produce effects, wholly different from those which the parties professing them contemplate.

On the one side, to sanction from authority the notion, that there are some powers of the Crown which may be safely dispensed with, — to accustom the people to an abridged exercise of the Prerogative, with the risk of suggesting to their minds that its full efficacy needs not be resumed, — to set an example, in short, of reducing the Kingly Power, which, by its success, may invite and authorize still further encroachments, — all these are dangers to which the alleged doctrine of Toryism, whenever brought into practice, exposes its idol; and more particularly in enlightened and speculative times, when the minds of men are in quest of the right and the useful, and when a superfluity of power is one of those abuses, which they are least likely

to overlook or tolerate. In such seasons, the experiment of the Tory might lead to all that he most deprecates, and the branches of the Prerogative, once cut away, might, like the lopped boughs of the fir-tree, never grow again.

On the other hand, the Whig, who asserts that the Royal Prerogative ought to be reduced to such powers as are beneficial to the people, and yet stipulates, as an invariable principle, for the transfer of that Prerogative full and unimpaired, whenever it passes into other hands, appears, even more perhaps than the Tory, to throw an obstacle in the way of his own object. Circumstances, he grants, may arise, when the increase of the powers of the Crown, in other ways, may render it advisable to controul some of its established prerogatives. But, where are we to find a fit moment for such a reform, — or what opening will be left for it by this fastidious Whig principle, which, in 1680, could see no middle step between a change of the Succession, and an undiminished maintenance of the Prerogative, and which, in 1789, almost upon the heels of a Declaration that "the power of the Crown had increased and ought to be diminished," protested against even an experimental reduction of it!

According to Mr. Fox, it is a distinctive characteristic of the Tory, to attach more import-

ance to the person of the King than to his office. But, assuredly, the Tory is not singular in this want of political abstraction; and, in England, (from a defect, Hume thinks, inherent in all limited monarchies,) the personal qualities and opinions of the Sovereign have considerable influence upon the whole course of public affairs, —being felt alike in that courtly sphere around them where their attraction acts, and in that outer circle of opposition where their repulsion comes into play. To this influence, then, upon the Government and the community, of which no abstraction can deprive the person of the monarch, the Whig principle in question (which seems to consider entireness of Prerogative as necessary to a King, as the entireness of his limbs was held to be among the Athenians,) superadds the vast power, both actual and virtual, which would flow from the inviolability of the Royal office, and forecloses so far, the chance which the more pliant Tory doctrine would leave open, of counteracting the effects of the King's indirect personal influence, by curtailing or weakening the grasp of some of his direct regal powers. Ovid represents the Deity of Light (and on an occasion, too, which may be called a Regency question) as crowned with moveable rays, which might be put off when too strong or dazzling. But, according to this principle, the crown of

CHAP. XIII. 1789.

Prerogative must keep its rays fixed and immovable, and (as the poet expresses it) "*circa caput* OMNE *micantes.*"

Upon the whole, however high the authorities, by which this Whig doctrine was enforced in 1789, its manifest tendency, in most cases, to secure a perpetuity of superfluous powers to the Crown, appears to render it unfit, at least as an invariable principle, for any party professing to have the liberty of the people for their object. The Prince, in his admirable Letter upon the subject of the Regency to Mr. Pitt, was made to express the unwillingness which he felt "that in his person an experiment should be made, to ascertain with how small a portion of Kingly power the executive government of the country might be carried on;"—but imagination has not far to go in supposing a case, where the enormous patronage vested in the Crown, and the consequent increase of a Royal bias through the community, might give such an undue and unsafe preponderance to that branch of the Legislature, as would render any safe opportunity, however acquired, of ascertaining with *how much less* power the executive government could be carried on, most acceptable, in spite of any dogmas to the contrary, to all true lovers as well of the monarchy as of the people.

Having given thus much consideration to the

opinions and principles, professed on both sides of this constitutional question, it is mortifying, after all, to be obliged to acknowledge, that in the relative situation of the two parties at the moment, may be found perhaps the real, and but too natural, source of the decidedly opposite views which they took on the subject. Mr. Pitt, about to surrender the possession of power to his rival, had a very intelligible interest in reducing the value of the transfer, and (as a retreating army spike the guns they leave behind) rendering the engines of Prerogative as useless as possible to his successor. Mr. Fox, too, had as natural a motive to oppose such a design; and, aware that the chief aim of these restrictive measures was to entail upon the Whig ministry of the Regent a weak Government and strong Opposition, would, of course, eagerly welcome the aid of any abstract principle, that might sanction him in resisting such a mutilation of the Royal power;—well knowing that (as in the case of the Peerage Bill in the reign of George I.) the proceedings altogether were actuated more by ill-will to the successor in the trust, than by any sincere zeal for the purity of its exercise.

Had the situations of the two leaders been reversed, it is more than probable that their mode of thinking and acting would have been so likewise. Mr. Pitt, with the prospect of

CHAP. XIII.

1789.

power before his eyes, would have been still more strenuous, perhaps, for the unbroken transmission of the Prerogative—his natural leaning on the side of power being increased by his own approaching share in it. Mr. Fox, too, if stopped, like his rival, in a career of successful administration, and obliged to surrender up the reins of the state to Tory guidance, might have found in his popular principles a still more plausible pretext, for the abridgment of power in such unconstitutional hands. He might even too, perhaps, (as his India Bill warrants us in supposing,) have been tempted into the same sort of alienation of the Royal patronage, as that which Mr. Pitt now practised in the establishment of the Queen, and have taken care to leave behind him a strong hold of Whiggism, to facilitate the resumption of his position, whenever an opportunity might present itself. Such is human nature, even in its noblest specimens, and so are the strongest spirits shaped by the mould in which chance and circumstances have placed them.

Mr. Sheridan spoke frequently in the Debates on this question, but his most important agency lay in the less public business connected with it. He was the confidential adviser of the Prince throughout, directed every step he took, and was the author of most of his correspondence on the

subject. There is little doubt, I think, that the celebrated and masterly Letter to Mr. Pitt, which by some persons has been attributed to Burke, and by others to Sir Gilbert Elliot (afterwards Lord Minto), was principally the production of Mr. Sheridan. For the supposition that it was written by Burke there are, besides the merits of the production, but very scanty grounds. So little was he at that period in those habits of confidence with the Prince, which would entitle him to be selected for such a task in preference to Sheridan, that but eight or ten days before the date of this letter (Jan. 2.) he had declared in the House of Commons, that "he knew as little of the inside of Carlton House as he did of Buckingham House." Indeed, the violent state of this extraordinary man's temper, during the whole of the discussions and proceedings on the Regency, would have rendered him, even had his intimacy with the Prince been closer, an unfit person for the composition of a document, requiring so much caution, temper, and delicacy.

The conjecture that Sir Gilbert Elliot was the author of it is somewhat more plausible,—that gentleman being at this period high in the favour of the Prince, and possessing talents sufficient to authorize the suspicion (which was in itself a reputation) that he had been the writer of a

CHAP. XIII. 1788.

composition so admirable. But it seems hardly necessary to seek farther for the author of it than Mr. Sheridan, who, besides being known to have acted the part of the Prince's adviser through the whole transaction, is proved, by the rough copies found among his papers, to have written several other important documents connected with the Regency.

I may also add that an eminent statesman of the present day, who was at that period, though very young, a distinguished friend of Mr. Sheridan, and who has shown by the ability of his own State Papers that he has not forgot the lessons of that school from which this able production emanated, remembers having heard some passages of the Letter discussed in Bruton Street, as if it were then in the progress of composition, and has always, I believe, been under the impression that it was principally the work of Mr. Sheridan.*

I had written thus far on the subject of this Letter—and shall leave what I have written as a memorial of the fallacy of such conjectures—when, having still some doubts of my correctness in attributing the honour of the composition

* To this authority may be added also that of the Bishop of Winchester, who says,—"Mr. Sheridan was supposed to have been materially concerned in drawing up this admirable composition."

to Sheridan, I resolved to ask the opinion of my friend, Sir James Mackintosh, a person above all others qualified, by relationship of talent, to recognize and "speak to" the mighty spirit of Burke, in whatever shape the "Royal Dane" may appear. The strong impression on his mind—amounting almost to certainty—was that no other hand but that of Burke could have written the greater part of the Letter;* and by a more diligent inquiry, in which his kindness assisted me, it has been ascertained that his opinion was, as it could not fail to be, correct. The following extract from a letter written by Lord Minto at the time, referring obviously to the surmise that he was, himself, the author of the paper, confirms beyond a doubt the fact, that it was written almost solely by Burke:—

* It is amusing to observe how tastes differ;—the following is the opinion entertained of this letter by a gentleman, who, I understand and can easily believe, is an old established Reviewer. After mentioning that it was attributed to the pen of Burke, he adds,—"The story, however, does not seem entitled to much credit, for the internal character of the paper is too vapid and heavy for the genius of Burke, whose ardent mind would assuredly have diffused vigour into the composition, and the correctness of whose judgment would as certainly have preserved it from the charge of inelegance and grammatical deficiency."—Dr. WATKINS, *Life of Sheridan*.

Such, in nine cases out of ten, are the periodical guides of public taste.

CHAP. XIII.

1789.

" January 31st, 1789.

" There was not a word of the Prince's Letter to Pitt mine. It was originally Burke's altered a little, but not improved, by Sheridan and other critics. The answer made by the Prince yesterday to the Address of the two Houses was entirely mine, and done in a great hurry half an hour before it was to be delivered."

While it is with regret I give up the claim of Mr. Sheridan to this fine specimen of English composition, it but adds to my intense admiration of Burke—not on account of the beauty of the writing, for his fame required no such accession—but from that triumph of mind over temper which it exhibits—that forgetfulness of *Self*, the true, transmigrating power of genius, which enabled him thus to pass his spirit into the station of Royalty, and to assume all the calm dignity, both of style and feeling, that became it.

It was to be expected that the conduct of Lord Thurlow at this period should draw down upon him all the bitterness of those who were in the secret of his ambidextrous policy, and who knew both his disposition to desert, and the nature of the motives that prevented him. To Sheridan, in particular, such a result of a negotiation, in which he had been the principal

mover and mediator, could not be otherwise than deeply mortifying. Of all the various talents with which he was gifted, his dexterity in political intrigue and management was that of which he appears to have been most vain; and this vanity it was that, at a later period of his life, sometimes led him to branch off from the main body of his party, upon secret and solitary enterprises of ingenuity, which—as may be expected from all such independent movements of a partisan—generally ended in thwarting his friends and embarrassing himself.

In the debate on that clause of the Bill which restricted the Regent from granting places or pensions in reversion, he is represented as having attacked Lord Thurlow in terms of the most unqualified severity,—speaking of "the natural ferocity and sturdiness of his temper," and of "his brutal bluffness." But to such abuse, unseasoned by wit, Mr. Sheridan was not at all likely to have condescended, being well aware that, "as in smooth oil the razor best is set," so satire is whetted to its most perfect keenness by courtesy. His clumsy reporters have, in this, as in almost all other instances, misrepresented him.

With equal personality, but more playfulness, Mr. Burke, in exposing that wretched fiction, by which the Great Seal was converted into the

CHAP. XIII.

1789.

Third Branch of the Legislature, and the assent of the King forged to a Bill, in which his incapacity to give either assent or dissent was declared, thus expressed himself:—" But what is to be done when the Crown is in a *deliquium?* It was intended, he had heard, to set up a man with black brows and a large wig, a kind of scare-crow to the two Houses, who was to give a fictitious assent in the royal name—and this to be binding on the people at large!" The following remarkable passage, too, in a subsequent Speech, is almost too well known to be cited:—" The other House," he said, " were not yet perhaps recovered from that extraordinary burst of the pathetic which had been exhibited the other evening; they had not yet dried their eyes, or been restored to their former placidity, and were unqualified to attend to new business. The tears shed in that House on the occasion to which he alluded, were not the tears of patriots for dying laws, but of Lords for their expiring places. The iron tears, which flowed down Pluto's cheek, rather resembled the dismal bubbling of the Styx, than the gentle murmuring streams of Aganippe."

While Lord Thurlow was thus treated by the party whom he had so nearly joined, he was but coldly welcomed back by the Minister whom he had so nearly deserted. His reconciliation, too,

with the latter was by no means either sincere or durable,—the renewal of friendship between politicians, on such occasions, being generally like that which the Diable Boiteux describes, as having taken place between himself and a brother sprite,—"We were reconciled, embraced, and have hated each other heartily ever since."

In the Regency, indeed, and the transactions connected with it, may be found the source of most of those misunderstandings and enmities which broke out soon after among the eminent men of that day, and were attended with consequences so important to themselves and the country. By the difference just mentioned, between Mr. Pitt and Lord Thurlow, the ministerial arrangements of 1793 were facilitated, and the learned Lord, after all his sturdy pliancy, consigned to a life of ineffectual discontent ever after.

The disagreement between Mr. Burke and Mr. Fox, if not actually originating now—and its foundations had been, perhaps, laid from the beginning, in the total dissimilarity of their dispositions and sentiments—was, at least, considerably ripened and accelerated by the events of this period, and by the discontent that each of them, like partners in unsuccessful play, was known to feel at the mistakes which the other

CHAP. XIII.

1789.

had committed in the game. Mr. Fox had, unquestionably, every reason to lament as well as blame the violence and virulence by which his associate had disgraced the contest. The effect produced upon the public by the irreverent sallies of Burke, and by the too evident triumph, both of hate and hope, with which he regarded the calamitous situation of the King, contributed not a little to render still lower the already low temperature of popularity at which his party stood throughout the country. It seemed as if a long course of ineffectual struggle in politics, of frustrated ambition and unrewarded talents, had at length exasperated his mind to a degree beyond endurance; and the extravagances into which he was hurried in his speeches on this question, appear to have been but the first workings of that impatience of a losing cause—that resentment of failure, and disgust at his partners in it—which soon afterwards found such a signal opportunity of exploding.

That Mr. Burke, upon far less grounds, was equally discontented with his co-operators in this emergency, may be collected from the following passage of a letter, addressed by him in the summer of this year to Lord Charlemont, and given by Hardy in his Memoirs of that nobleman.—

"Perpetual failure, even though nothing in that failure can be fixed on the improper choice of the object or the injudicious choice of means, will detract every day more and more from a man's credit, until he ends without success and without reputation. In fact, a constant pursuit even of the best objects, without adequate instruments, detracts something from the opinion of a man's judgment. This, I think, may be in part the cause of the inactivity of others of our friends who are in the vigour of life and in possession of a great degree of lead and authority. I do not blame them, though I lament that state of the public mind, in which the people can consider the exclusion of such talents and such virtues from their service, as a point gained to them. The only point in which I can find any thing to blame in these friends, is their not taking the effectual means, which they certainly had in their power, of making an honourable retreat from their prospect of power into the possession of reputation, by an effectual defence of themselves. There was an opportunity which was not made use of for that purpose, and which could scarcely have failed of turning the tables on their adversaries."

Another instance of the embittering influence of these transactions may be traced in their effects upon Mr. Burke and Mr. Sheridan—between whom there had arisen a degree of emulation, amounting to jealousy, which, though hitherto chiefly confined to one of the parties, received on this occasion such an addition of fuel, as spread it equally through the minds of both, and conduced, in no small degree, to the

CHAP. XIII.

1789.

explosion that followed. Both Irishmen, and both adventurers in a region so much elevated above their original station, it was but natural that some such feeling should kindle between them; and that, as Burke was already midway in his career, when Sheridan was but entering the field, the stirrings, whether of emulation or envy, should first be felt by the latter. It is said that in the ceremonial of Hastings's Trial, the privileges enjoyed by Burke, as a Privy-counsellor, were regarded with evident uneasiness by his brother Manager, who could not as yet boast the distinction of Right Honourable before his name. As soon, however, as the rapid run of Sheridan's success had enabled him to overtake his veteran rival, this feeling of jealousy took possession in full force of the latter, —and the close relations of intimacy and confidence, to which Sheridan was now admitted both by Mr. Fox and the Prince, are supposed to have been not the least of those causes of irritation and disgust, by which Burke was at length driven to break with the party altogether, and to show his gigantic strength at parting, by carrying away some of the strongest pillars of Whiggism in his grasp.

Lastly, to this painful list of the feuds, whose origin is to be found in the times and transactions of which we are speaking, may be added

that slight, but too visible cloud of misunderstanding, which arose between Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan, and which, though it never darkened into any thing serious, continued to pervade their intercourse with each other to the last—exhibiting itself, on the part of Mr. Fox, in a degree of distrustful reserve not natural to him, and, on the side of Sheridan, in some of those counter-workings of influence, which, as I have already said, he was sometimes induced by his love of the diplomacy of politics to practise.

Among the appointments named in contemplation of a Regency, the place of Treasurer of the Navy was allotted to Mr. Sheridan. He would never, however, admit the idea of certainty in any of the arrangements so sanguinely calculated upon, but continually impressed upon his impatient friends the possibility, if not probability, of the King's recovery. He had even refused to look at the plan of the apartments, which he himself was to occupy in Somerset House; and had but just agreed that it should be sent to him for examination, on the very day when the King was declared convalescent by Dr. Warren. "He entered his own house (to use the words of the relater of the anecdote) at dinner-time with the news. There were present,

CHAP. XIII.

1789.

—besides Mrs. Sheridan and his sister,—Tickell, who, on the change of administration, was to have been immediately brought into Parliament,—Joseph Richardson, who was to have had Tickell's place of Commissioner of the Stamp-office,—Mr. Reid, and some others. Not one of the company but had cherished expectations from the approaching change—not one of them, however, had lost so much as Mr. Sheridan. With his wonted equanimity he announced the sudden turn affairs had taken, and looking round him cheerfully, as he filled a large glass, said,—'Let us all join in drinking His Majesty's speedy recovery.'"

The measures which the Irish Parliament adopted on this occasion, would have been productive of anomalies, both theoretic and practical, had the continued illness of the King allowed the projected Regency to take place. As it was, the most material consequence that ensued was the dismissal from their official situations of Mr. Ponsonby and other powerful individuals, by which the Whig party received such an accession of strength, as enabled them to work out for their country the few blessings of liberty that still remain to her. Among the victims to their votes on this question was Mr. Charles Sheridan, who, on the recovery of the King, was dismissed

from his office of Secretary of War, but received compensation by a pension of 1200*l.* a year, with the reversion of 300*l.* a year to his wife.

The ready and ardent burst of devotion with which Ireland, at this moment, like the Pythagoreans at their morning worship, turned to welcome with her Harp the Rising Sun, was long remembered by the object of her homage with pride and gratitude,—and, let us trust, is not even yet entirely forgotten.*

It has already been mentioned that to Mr. Sheridan, at this period, was entrusted the task of drawing up several of the State Papers of the Heir-Apparent. From the rough copies of these papers that have fallen into my hands, I shall content myself with selecting two Letters—the first of which was addressed by the Prince to the Queen, immediately after the communication to Her Majesty of the Resolution of the two Houses placing the Royal Household under her control.

"Before Your Majesty gives an answer to the application for your Royal permission to place under Your Majesty's separate authority the

* This vain hope was expressed before the late decision on the Catholic question had proved to the Irish that, where *their* rights are concerned, neither public nor private pledges are regarded.

CHAP. XIII. 1789.

direction and appointment of the King's household, and thereby to separate from the difficult and arduous situation which I am unfortunately called upon to fill, the accustomed and necessary support which has ever belonged to it, permit me with every sentiment of duty and affection towards Your Majesty to entreat your attentive perusal of the papers which I have the honour to enclose. They contain a sketch of the plan now proposed to be carried into execution as communicated to me by Mr. Pitt, and the sentiments which I found myself bound in duty to declare in reply to that communication. I take the liberty of lodging these papers in Your Majesty's hands, confiding that, whenever it shall please Providence to remove the malady with which the King my father is now unhappily afflicted, Your Majesty will, in justice to me and to those of the Royal family whose affectionate concurrence and support I have received, take the earliest opportunity of submitting them to his Royal perusal, in order that no interval of time may elapse before he is in possession of the true motives and principles upon which I have acted. I here solemnly repeat to Your Majesty, that among those principles there is not one which influences my mind so much as the firm persuasion I have, that my conduct in endeavouring to maintain unimpaired and undivided

the just rights, prerogatives, and dignity of the Crown, in the person of the King's representative, is the only line of conduct which would entitle me to His Majesty's approbation, or enable me to stand with confidence in his Royal presence on the happy day of his recovery;—and, on the contrary, that those who, under colour of respect and attachment to his Royal person, have contrived this project for enfeebling and degrading the executive authority of the realm, will be considered by him as having risked the happiness of his people, and the security of the throne itself, by establishing a fatal precedent which may hereafter be urged against his own authority, on as plausible pretences, or revived against the just rights of his family. In speaking my opinions of the motive of the projectors of this scheme, I trust I need not assure Your Majesty that the respect, duty, and affection I owe to Your Majesty have never suffered me for a single moment to consider you as countenancing in the slightest degree, their plan or their purposes. I have the firmest reliance on Your Majesty's early declaration to me, on the subject of public affairs, at the commencement of our common calamity; and, whatever may be the efforts of evil or interested advisers, I have the same confidence that you will never permit or endure that the influence of your respected name

shall be profaned to the purpose of distressing the government and insulting the person of your son. How far those, who are evidently pursuing both these objects, may be encouraged by Your Majesty's acceptance of one part of the powers purposed to be lodged in your hands, I will not presume to say.* The proposition has assumed the shape of a Resolution of Parliament, and therefore I am silent.

"Your Majesty will do me the honour to weigh the opinions I formed and declared before Parliament had entertained the plan, and, with those before you, your own good judgment will decide. I have only to add that whatever that decision may be, nothing will ever alter the interest of true affection and inviolable duty," &c. &c.

The second Letter that I shall give, from the rough copy of Mr. Sheridan, was addressed by

* In speaking of the extraordinary *imperium in imperio*, with which the command of so much power and patronage would have invested the Queen, the Annual Register (Robinson's) remarks justly, "It was not the least extraordinary circumstance in these transactions, that the Queen could be prevailed upon to lend her name to a project which would eventually have placed her in avowed rivalship with her son, and at a moment when her attention might seem to be absorbed by domestic calamity, have established her at the head of a political party."

the Prince to the King after his recovery, announcing the intention of His Royal Highness to submit to His Majesty a Memorial, in vindication of his own conduct and that of his Royal brother the Duke of York throughout the whole of the proceedings consequent upon His Majesty's indisposition.

" SIR,

" Thinking it probable that I should have been honoured with your commands to attend Your Majesty on Wednesday last, I have unfortunately lost the opportunity of paying my duty to Your Majesty before your departure from Weymouth. The accounts I have received of Your Majesty's health have given me the greatest satisfaction, and should it be Your Majesty's intention to return to Weymouth, I trust, Sir, there will be no impropriety in my *then* intreating Your Majesty's gracious attention to a point of the greatest moment to the peace of my own mind, and one in which I am convinced Your Majesty's feelings are equally interested. Your Majesty's letter to my brother the Duke of Clarence, in May last, was the first direct intimation I had ever received that my conduct and that of my brother the Duke of York, during Your Majesty's late lamented illness, had brought on us the heavy misfortune of Your Majesty's displea-

CHAP. XIII.

1789.

sure. I should be wholly unworthy the return of Your Majesty's confidence and good opinion, which will ever be the first objects of my life, if I could have read the passage I refer to in that letter without the deepest sorrow and regret for the effect produced on Your Majesty's mind; though at the same time I felt the firmest persuasion that Your Majesty's generosity and goodness would never permit that effect to *remain*, without affording us an opportunity of knowing what had been urged against us, of replying to our accusers, and of justifying ourselves, if the means of justification were in our power.

" Great however as my impatience and anxiety were on this subject, I felt it a superior consideration not to intrude any unpleasing or agitating discussions upon Your Majesty's attention, during an excursion devoted to the ease and amusement necessary for the re-establishment of Your Majesty's health. I determined to sacrifice my own feelings, and to wait with resignation till the fortunate opportunity should arrive, when Your Majesty's own paternal goodness would, I was convinced, lead you even to *invite* your sons to that fair hearing, which your justice would not deny to the meanest individual of your subjects. In this painful interval I have employed myself in drawing up a full statement and account of my conduct during the period

alluded to, and of the motives and circumstances which influenced me. When these shall be humbly submitted to Your Majesty's consideration, I may be possibly found to have erred in judgment, and to have acted on mistaken principles, but I have the most assured conviction that I shall not be found to have been deficient in that duteous affection to Your Majesty which nothing shall ever diminish. Anxious for every thing that may contribute to the comfort and satisfaction of Your Majesty's mind, I cannot omit this opportunity of lamenting those appearances of a less gracious disposition in the Queen, towards my brothers and myself, than we were accustomed to experience; and to assure Your Majesty, that if by your affectionate interposition these most unpleasant sensations should be happily removed, it would be an event not less grateful to our minds than satisfactory to Your Majesty's own benign disposition. I will not longer, &c. &c. G. P."

The Statement here announced by His Royal Highness (a copy of which I have seen, occupying, with its Appendix, near a hundred folio pages,) is supposed to have been drawn up by Lord Minto.

To descend from documents of such high import to one of a much humbler nature, the

CHAP. XIII.

1789.

following curious memorial was presented this year to Mr. Sheridan, by a literary gentleman whom the Whig party thought it worth while to employ in their service, and who, as far as industry went, appears to have been not unworthy of his hire. Simonides is said to be the first author that ever wrote for pay, but Simonides little dreamt of the perfection to which his craft would one day be brought.

"*Memorial for Dr. W. T.* Fitzroy Street, Fitzroy Chapel.*

"In May, 1787, Dr. Parr, in the name of his political friends, engaged Dr. T. to embrace those opportunities, which his connections with booksellers and periodical publications might afford him, of supporting the principles of their party. Mr. Sheridan, in August, 1787, gave two notes, *50l.* each, to Dr. T. for the first year's service, which notes were paid at different periods —the first by Mr. Sheridan at Brookes's, in January, 1788, the second by Mr. Windham in May, 1788. Mr. Sheridan, in different conver-

* This industrious Scotchman (of whose name I have only given the initials) was not without some share of humour. On hearing that a certain modern philosopher had carried his belief in the perfectibility of all living things so far, as to say that he did not despair of seeing the day when tigers themselves might be educated, Dr. T. exclaimed, "I should like dearly to see him in a cage with *two* of his pupils!"

sations encouraged Dr. T. to go on with the expectation of a like sum yearly, or 50*l.* half yearly. Dr. T. with this encouragement engaged in different publications for the purpose of this agreement. He is charged for the most part with the Political and Historical articles in the Analytical Review, and he also occasionally writes the Political Appendix to the English Review, of which particularly he wrote that for April last, and that for June last. He also every week writes an abridgment of Politics for the Whitehall Evening Post, and a Political Review every month for a Sunday paper entitled The Review and Sunday Advertiser. In a Romance, entitled 'Mammoth, or Human Nature displayed,' &c. Dr. T. has shown how mindful he is on all occasions of his engagements to those who confide in him. He has also occasionally moved other engines, which it would be tedious and might appear too trifling to mention. Dr. T. is not ignorant that uncommon charges have happened in the course of this last year, that is, the year preceding May, 1789. Instead of 100*l.* therefore, he will be satisfied with 50*l.* for that year, provided that this abatement shall not form a precedent against his claim of 100*l.* annually, if his further services shall be deemed acceptable. There is one point on which Dr. T. particularly reserved himself, namely, to make no

CHAP. XIII. 1789.

attack on Mr. Hastings, and this will be attested by Dr. Parr, Mr. Sheridan, and, if the Doctor rightly recollects, by Mr. Windham.

"Fitzroy Street, 21st July, 1789."

Taking into account all the various circumstances that concurred to glorify this period of Sheridan's life, we may allow ourselves, I think, to pause upon it as the apex of the pyramid; and, whether we consider his fame, his talents, or his happiness, may safely say, "Here is their highest point."

The new splendour which his recent triumphs in eloquence had added to a reputation already so illustrious, — the power which he seemed to have acquired over the future destinies of the country, by his acknowledged influence in the councils of the Heir Apparent, and the tribute paid to him, by the avowal both of friends and foes, that he had used this influence, in the late trying crisis of the Regency, with a judgment and delicacy that proved him worthy of it, — all these advantages, both brilliant and solid, which subsequent circumstances but too much tended to weaken, at this moment surrounded him in their newest lustre and promise.

He was just now, too, in the first enjoyment of a feeling, of which habit must have afterwards dulled the zest; namely, the proud con-

sciousness of having surmounted the disadvantages of birth and station, and placed himself on a level with the highest and noblest of the land. This footing in the society of the great he could only have attained by parliamentary eminence; — as a mere writer, with all his genius, he never would have been thus admitted *ad eundem* among them. Talents in literature or science, unassisted by the advantages of birth, may lead to association with the great, but rarely to equality; — it is a passport through the well-guarded frontier, but no title to naturalisation within. By him, who has not been born among them, this can only be achieved by politics. In that arena which they look upon as their own, the Legislature of the land, let a man of genius, like Sheridan, but assert his supremacy, — at once all these barriers of reserve and pride give way, and he takes, by right, a station at their side, which a Shakspeare or a Newton would but have enjoyed by courtesy.

In fixing upon this period of Sheridan's life, as the most shining æra of his talents as well as his fame, it is not meant to be denied that in his subsequent warfare with the Minister, during the stormy time of the French Revolution, he exhibited a prowess of oratory no less suited to that actual service, than his eloquence on the trial of Hastings had been to such lighter tilts

and tournaments of peace. But the effect of his talents was far less striking;—the current of feeling through England was against him;—and, however greatly this added to the merits of his efforts, it deprived him of that echo from the public heart, by which the voice of the orator is endued with a sort of multiplied life, and, as it were, survives itself. In the panic, too, that followed the French Revolution, all eloquence, but that from the lips of Power, was disregarded, and the voice of him at the helm was the only one listened to in the storm.

Of his happiness, at the period of which we are speaking, in the midst of so much success and hope, there can be but little doubt. Though pecuniary embarrassment, as appears from his papers, had already begun to weave its fatal net around him, there was as yet little more than sufficed to give exercise to his ingenuity, and the resources of the Drury-Lane treasury were still in full nightly flow. The charms, by which his home was embellished, were such as few other homes could boast; and, if any thing made it less happy than it ought to be, the cause was to be found in the very brilliancy of his life and attractions, and in those triumphs out of the sphere of domestic love, to which his vanity, perhaps, oftener than his feelings, impelled him.

Among his own immediate associates, the

gaiety of his spirits amounted almost to boyishness. He delighted in all sorts of dramatic tricks and disguises; and the lively parties, with which his country-house was always filled, were kept in momentary expectation of some new device for their mystification or amusement.* It was not unusual to despatch a man and horse seven or eight miles for a piece of crape or a mask, or some other such trifle for these frolics. His friends Tickell and Richardson, both men of wit and humour, and the former possessing the same degree of light animal spirits as himself, were the constant companions of all his

* To give some idea of the youthful tone of this society, I shall mention one out of many anecdotes related to me by persons who had themselves been ornaments of it. The ladies having one evening received the gentlemen in masquerade dresses, which, with their obstinate silence, made it impossible to distinguish one from the other, the gentlemen in their turn, invited the ladies, next evening to a similar trial of conjecture on themselves; and notice being given that they were ready dressed, Mrs. Sheridan and her companions were admitted into the dining-room, where they found a party of Turks, sitting silent and masked round the table. After a long course of the usual guesses, exclamations, &c. &c. and each lady having taken the arm of the person she was most sure of, they heard a burst of laughter through the half-open door, and looking there, saw the gentlemen themselves in their proper persons, — the masks, upon whom they had been lavishing their sagacity, being no other than the maid-servants of the house, who had been thus dressed up to deceive them.

CHAP. XIII.

1790.

social hours, and kept up with him that ready rebound of pleasantry, without which the play of wit languishes.

There is a letter, written one night by Richardson at Tunbridge*, (after waiting five long hours for Sheridan,) so full of that mixture of melancholy and humour, which chequered the mind of this interesting man, that, as illustrative of the character of one of Sheridan's most intimate friends, it may be inserted here:—

"Half past nine, Mount Ephraim.

"DEAR SHERIDAN,

"After you had been gone an hour or two I got moped damnably. Perhaps there is a sympathy between the corporeal and the mind's eye. In the Temple I can't see far before me, and seldom extend my speculations on things to come into any fatiguing sketch of reflection.—From your window, however, there was a tedious scope of black atmosphere, that I think won

* In the year 1790, when Mrs. Sheridan was trying the waters of Tunbridge, for her health. In a letter to Sheridan's sister from this place, dated September, 1790, she says, "I drink the waters once a day, and ride and drive all the forenoon, which makes me ravenous when I return. I feel I am in very good health, and I am told that I am in high beauty, two circumstances which ought and do put me in high good humour."

my mind into a sort of fellow-travellership, pacing me again through the cheerless waste of the past, and presenting hardly one little rarefied cloud to give a dim ornament to the future; — not a star to be seen; — no permanent light to gild my horizon; — only the fading helps to transient gaiety in the lamps of Tunbridge; — no Law coffee-house at hand, or any other house of relief; — no antagonist to bicker one into a controul of one's cares by a successful opposition*, nor a softer enemy to soothe one into an oblivion of them.

* Richardson was remarkable for his love of disputation; and Tickell, when hard pressed by him in argument, used often, as a last resource, to assume the voice and manner of Mr. Fox, which he had the power of mimicking so exactly, that Richardson confessed he sometimes stood awed and silenced by the resemblance.

This disputatious humour of Richardson was once turned to account by Sheridan in a very characteristic manner. Having had a hackney-coach in employ for five or six hours, and not being provided with the means of paying it, he happened to espy Richardson in the street, and proposed to take him in the coach some part of his way. The offer being accepted, Sheridan lost no time in starting a subject of conversation, on which he knew his companion was sure to become argumentative and animated. Having, by well-managed contradiction, brought him to the proper pitch of excitement, he affected to grow impatient and angry himself, and saying that "he could not think of staying in the same coach with a person that would use such language," pulled the check-string, and desired the coachman to let him out. Richardson, wholly occupied with the argument, and re-

CHAP. XIII.

1790.

"It is damned foolish for ladies to leave their scissors about; — the frail thread of a worthless life is soon snipped. I wish to God my fate had been true to its first destination, and made a parson of me; — I should have made an excellent country Joll. I think I can, with confidence, pronounce the character that would have been given of me: — He was an indolent good-humoured man, civil at all times, and hospitable at others, namely, when he was able to be so, which, truth to say, happened but seldom. His sermons were better than his preaching, and his doctrine better than his life; though often grave, and sometimes melancholy, he nevertheless loved a joke, — the more so when overtaken in his cups, which, a regard to the faith of history compels us to subjoin, fell out not unfrequently. He had more thought than was generally imputed to him, though it must be owned no man alive ever exercised thought to so little purpose. Rebecca, his wife, the daughter of an opulent farmer in the neighbourhood of his small living, brought him eighteen children; and he now

---

garding the retreat of his opponent as an acknowledgment of defeat, still pressed his point, and even hollowed "more last words" through the coach window after Sheridan, who, walking quietly home, left the poor disputant responsible for the heavy fare of the coach.

rests with those who, being rather *not* absolutely vicious than actively good, confide in the bounty of Providence to strike a mild average between the contending negations of their life, and to allow them in their future state, what he ordained them in this earthly pilgrimage, a snug neutrality and a useless repose. — I had written thus far, absolutely determined, under an irresistible influence of the megrims, to set off for London on foot, when, accidentally searching for a cardialgic, to my great delight, I discovered three fugitive sixpences, headed by a vagrant shilling, immerged in the heap in my waistcoat pocket. This discovery gave an immediate elasticity to my mind; and I have therefore devised a scheme, worthier the improved state of my spirits, namely, to swindle your servants out of a horse, under the pretence of a ride upon the heath, and to jog on contentedly homewards. So, under the protection of Providence, and the mercy of footpads, I trust we shall meet again, to-morrow; at all events, there is nothing huffish in this; for, whether sad or merry, I am always,

"Most affectionately yours,

"J. RICHARDSON.

"P. S. Your return only confirmed me in my resolution of going; for I had worked myself, in five hours' solitude, into such a state of ner-

vous melancholy, that I found I could not help the meanness of crying, even if any one looked me in the face. I am anxious to avoid a regular conviction of so disreputable an infirmity; — besides, the night has become quite pleasant."

Between Tickell and Sheridan there was a never-ending "skirmish of wit," both verbal and practical; and the latter kind, in particular, was carried on between them with all the waggery, and, not unfrequently, the malice of school-boys.* Tickell, much less occupied by business than his friend, had always some political *jeux-d'esprit* on the anvil; and sometimes these trifles were produced by them jointly. The following string of pasquinades, so well known in political circles, and written, as the

* On one occasion, Sheridan having covered the floor of a dark passage, leading from the drawing-room, with all the plates and dishes of the house, ranged closely together, provoked his unconscious play-fellow to pursue him into the midst of them. Having left a path for his own escape, he passed through easily, but Tickell falling at full length into the ambuscade, was very much cut in several places. The next day, Lord John Townshend, on paying a visit to the bed-side of Tickell, found him covered over with patches, and indignantly vowing vengeance against Sheridan for this unjustifiable trick. In the midst of his anger, however, he could not help exclaiming, with the true feeling of an amateur of this sort of mischief, "But how amazingly well done it was!"

reader will perceive, at different dates, though principally by Sheridan, owes some of its stanzas to Tickell, and a few others to Lord John Townshend. I have strung together, without regard to chronology, the best of these detached lampoons. Time having removed their venom, and with it, in a great degree, their wit, they are now, like dried snakes, mere harmless objects of curiosity.

"Johnny W—lks, Johnny W—lks *,
Thou greatest of bilks,
How chang'd are the notes you now sing!
Your fam'd Forty-five
Is Prerogative,
And your blasphemy, 'God save the King,'
Johnny W—lks,
And your blasphemy, 'God save the King.'"

"Jack Ch—ch—ll, Jack Ch—ch—ll,
The town sure you search ill,
Your mob has disgraced all your brags;
When next you draw out
Your hospital rout,
Do, prithee, afford them clean rags,
Jack Ch—ch—ll,
Do, prithee, afford them clean rags."

* In Sheridan's copy of the stanzas written by him in this metre at the time of the Union, (beginning "Zooks, Harry! zooks, Harry!") he entitled them "An admirable new Ballad, which goes excellently well to the tune of

"Mrs. Arne, Mrs. Arne,
It gives me concarn," &c.

"Captain K—th, Captain K—th,
Keep your tongue 'twixt your teeth,
Lest bed-chamber tricks you betray;
And, if teeth you want more,
Why, my bold Commodore,—
You may borrow of Lord G—ll—y,
Captain K—th,
You may borrow of Lord G—ll—y."

* "Joe M—wb—y, Joe M—wb—y,
Your throat sure must raw be,
In striving to make yourself heard;
But it pleased not the pigs,
Nor the Westminster Whigs,
That your Knighthood should utter one word,
Joe M—wb—y,
That your Knighthood should utter one word."

"M—ntm—res, M—ntm—res,
Whom nobody for is,
And *for* whom we none of us care;
From Dublin you came—
It had been much the same
If Your Lordship had staid where you were,
M—ntm—res,
If Your Lordship had staid where you were."

"Lord O—gl—y, Lord O—gl—y,
You spoke mighty strongly—
Who you *are*, tho', all people admire!

* This stanza and, I rather think, the next were by Lord John Townshend.

But I'll let you depart,
For I believe in my heart,
You had rather they did not enquire,
Lord O—gl—y,
You had rather they did not enquire."

"Gl—nb—e, Gl—nb—e,
What's good for the scurvy?
For ne'er be your old trade forgot—
In your arms rather quarter
A pestle and mortar,
And your crest be a spruce gallipot,
Gl—nb—e,
Your crest be a spruce gallipot."

"Gl—nb—e, Gl—nb—e,
The world's topsy-turvy,
Of this truth you're the fittest attester;
For, who can deny
That the Low become High,
When the King makes a Lord of Silvester,
Gl—nb—e,
When the King makes a Lord of Silvester?"

"Mr. P—l, Mr. P—l,
In return for your zeal,
I am told they have dubb'd you Sir Bob;
Having got wealth enough
By coarse Manchester stuff,
For honours you'll now drive a job,
Mr. P—l,
For honours you'll now drive a job."

"Oh poor B—ks, oh poor B—ks,
Still condemn'd to the ranks,
Not e'en yet from a private promoted;
Pitt ne'er will relent,
Though he knows you repent
Having once or twice honestly voted,
Poor B—ks,
Having once or twice honestly voted."

"Dull H—l—y, dull H—l—y,
Your auditors feel ye
A speaker of very great weight,
And they wish you were dumb,
When, with ponderous hum,
You lengthen the drowsy debate,
Dull H—l—y,
You lengthen the drowsy debate."

There are about as many more of these stanzas, written, at different intervals, according as new victims, with good names for rhyming, presented themselves, — the metre being a most tempting medium for such lampoons. There is, indeed, appended to one of Sheridan's copies of them, a long list (like a Tablet of Proscription), containing about fifteen other names marked out for the same fate; and it will be seen by the following specimen that some of them had a very narrow escape: —

"Will C—rt—s . . . . ."
"V—ns—t—t, V—ns—t—t, — for little thou fit art."

" Will D—nd—s, Will D—nd—s, —were you only an ass."

" L—ghb—h, —thorough."

" Sam H—rsl—y, Sam H—rsl—y, . . . coarsely."

" P—ttym—n, P—ttym—n, — speak truth if you can."

But it was not alone for such lively purposes * that Sheridan and his two friends drew upon

* As I have been mentioning some instances of Sheridan's love of practical jests, I shall take this opportunity of adding one more anecdote, which I believe is pretty well known, but which I have had the advantage of hearing from the person on whom the joke was inflicted.

The Rev. Mr. O'B—— (afterwards Bishop of——) having arrived to dinner at Sheridan's country-house near Osterley, where, as usual, a gay party was collected, (consisting of General Burgoyne, Mrs. Crewe, Tickell, &c.) it was proposed that on the next day (Sunday) the Rev. Gentleman should, on gaining the consent of the resident clergyman, give a specimen of his talents as a preacher in the village-church. On his objecting that he was not provided with a sermon, his host offered to write one for him, if he would consent to preach it; and, the offer being accepted, Sheridan left the company early, and did not return for the remainder of the evening. The following morning Mr. O'B —— found the manuscript by his bed-side, tied together neatly (as he described it) with riband; — the subject of the discourse being the "Abuse of Riches." Having read it over and corrected some theological errors, (such as "it is easier for a camel, *as Moses says*, &c.) he delivered the sermon in his most impressive style, much to the delight of his own party, and to the satisfaction, as he unsuspectingly flattered himself, of all the rest of the congregation, among whom was Mr. Sheridan's wealthy neighbour, Mr. C.

Some months afterwards, however, Mr. O'B—— perceived

CHAP. XIII.

their joint wits; they had also but too much to do with subjects of a far different nature — with debts, bonds, judgments, writs, and all those other humiliating matters of fact, that bring Law and Wit so often and so unnaturally in contact. That they were serviceable to each other, in their defensive alliance against duns, is fully proved by various documents; and I have now before me articles of agreement, dated in 1787, by which Tickell, to avert an execution from the Theatre, bound himself as security for Sheridan in the sum of 250*l.*, — the arrears of an annuity charged upon Sheridan's moiety of the property. So soon did those pecuniary difficulties, by which his peace and character were afterwards undermined, begin their operations.

Yet even into transactions of this nature, little as they are akin to mirth, the following letter of Richardson will show that these brother wits contrived to infuse a portion of gaiety: —

---

that the family of Mr. C——, with whom he had previously been intimate, treated him with marked coldness; and, on his expressing some innocent wonder at the circumstance, was at length informed, to his dismay, by General Burgoyne, that the sermon which Sheridan had written for him, was, throughout, a personal attack upon Mr. C——, who had at that time rendered himself very unpopular in the neighbourhood by some harsh conduct to the poor, and to whom every one in the church, except the unconscious preacher, applied almost every sentence of the sermon.

" Essex Street, Saturday evening.

" DEAR SHERIDAN,

" I had a terrible long batch with Bobby this morning, after I wrote you by Francois. I have so far succeeded that he has agreed to continue the day of trial as *we* call it (that is, in vulgar, unlearned language, to put it off,) from Tuesday till Saturday. He demands, as preliminaries, that Wright's bill of 500*l.* should be given up to him, as a prosecution had been commenced against him, which, however, he has stopped by an injunction from the Court of Chancery. This, if the transaction be as he states it, appears reasonable enough. He insists, besides, that the bill should undergo the most rigid examination; that you should transmit your objections, to which he will send answers, (for the point of a personal interview has not been yet carried,) and that the whole amount at last, whatever it may be, should have your clear and satisfied approbation: — nothing to be done without this — almighty honour!

" All these things being done, I desired to know what was to be the result at last: — 'Surely, after having carried so many points, you will think it only common decency to relax a little as to the time of payment? You will not cut your pound of flesh the nearest from the merchant's heart?' To this Bobides, 'I must have

CHAP. XIII.

2000*l.* put in a shape of practicable use, and payment immediately; — for the rest I will accept security.' This was strongly objected to by me, as Jewish in the extreme; but, however, so we parted. You will think with me, I hope, that something has been done, however, by this meeting. It has opened an access to a favourable adjustment, and time and trist may do much. I am to see him again on Monday morning at two, so pray don't go out of town tomorrow without my seeing you. The matter is of immense consequence. I never knew till today that the process had been going on so long. I am convinced he could force you to trial next Tuesday, with all your infirmities green upon your head; so pray attend to it.

Yours ever,

J. RICHARDSON."

" *R. B. Sheridan, Esq.*
" *Lower Grosvenor Street.*

This letter was written in the year 1792, when Sheridan's involvements had begun to thicken around him more rapidly. There is another letter, about the same date, still more characteristic, — where, after beginning in evident anger and distress of mind, the writer breaks off, as if irresistibly, into the old strain of playfulness and good humour.

" Wednesday, Essex Street, July 30.

DEAR SHERIDAN,

" I write to you with more unpleasant feelings than I ever did in my life. Westly, after having told me for the last three weeks, that nothing was wanting for my accommodation but your consent, having told me so, so late as Friday, sends me word on Monday that he would not do it at all. In four days I have a *cognovit* expires for 200*l.* I can't suffer my family to be turned into the streets if I can help it. I have no resource but by abilities, such as they are. I certainly mean to write something in the course of the summer. As a matter of business and bargain I *can* have no higher hope about it than that you won't suffer by it. However, if you won't take it somebody else *must*, for no human consideration will induce me to leave any means untried, that may rescue my family from this impending misfortune.

" For the sake of convenience you will probably give me the importance of construing this into an incendiary letter. I wish to God you may, and order your treasurer to deposit the acceptance accordingly; for nothing can be so irksome to me as that the nations of the earth should think there had been any interruption of friendship between you and me; and though that would not be the case in fact, both being

CHAP. XIII.

influenced, I must believe, by a necessity which we could not control, yet the said nations would so interpret it. If I don't hear from you before Friday, I shall conclude that you leave me in this dire scrape to shift for myself.

Yours ever,

J. RICHARDSON."

" *R. B. Sheridan, Esq.*
" *Isleworth, Middlesex.*

CHAP. XIV.

FRENCH REVOLUTION.—MR. BURKE.—HIS BREACH WITH MR. SHERIDAN.—DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT.—MR. BURKE AND MR. FOX.—RUSSIAN ARMAMENT.—ROYAL SCOTCH BOROUGHS.

We have now to consider the conduct and opinions of Mr. Sheridan, during the measures and discussions consequent upon the French Revolution, — an event, by which the minds of men throughout all Europe were thrown into a state of such feverish excitement, that a more than usual degree of tolerance should be exercised towards the errors and extremes, into which all parties were hurried during the paroxysm. There was, indeed, no rank or class of society, whose interests and passions were not deeply involved in the question. The powerful and the rich, both of State and Church, must naturally have regarded with dismay the advance of a political heresy, whose path they saw strewed over with the broken talismans of rank and authority. Many, too, with a disinterested reverence for ancient institutions, trembled to see them thus approached by rash hands, whose

talents for ruin were sufficiently certain, but whose powers of reconstruction were yet to be tried. On the other hand, the easy triumph of a people over their oppressors was an example which could not fail to excite the hopes of the many as actively as the fears of the few. The great problem of the natural rights of mankind seemed about to be solved in a manner most flattering to the majority;—the zeal of the lover of liberty was kindled into enthusiasm, by a conquest achieved for his cause upon an arena so vast; and many, who before would have smiled at the doctrine of human perfectibility, now imagined they saw, in what the Revolution performed and promised, almost enough to sanction the indulgence of that splendid dream. It was natural, too, that the greater portion of that unemployed, and, as it were, homeless talent, which in all great communities, is ever abroad on the wing, uncertain where to settle, should now swarm round the light of the new principles,—while all those obscure but ambitious spirits, who felt their aspirings clogged by the medium in which they were sunk, would as naturally welcome such a state of political effervescence, as might enable them, like enfranchised air, to mount at once to the surface.

Amidst all these various interests, imaginations, and fears, which were brought to life by

the dawn of the French Revolution, it is not surprising that errors and excesses, both of conduct and opinion, should be among the first products of so new and sudden a movement of the whole civilized world;—that the friends of popular rights, presuming upon the triumph that had been gained, should, in the ardour of pursuit, push on the vanguard of their principles, somewhat farther than was consistent with prudence and safety; or that, on the other side, Authority and its supporters, alarmed by the inroads of the revolutionary spirit, should but the more stubbornly intrench themselves in established abuses, and make the dangers they apprehended from liberty a pretext for assailing its very existence.

It was not long before these effects of the French Revolution began to show themselves very strikingly in the politics of England; and, singularly enough, the two extreme opinions, to which, as I have just remarked, that disturbing event gave rise, instead of first appearing, as might naturally be expected, the one on the side of Government, and the other on that of the Opposition, both broke out simultaneously in the very heart of the latter body.

On such an imagination as that of Burke, the scenes now passing in France were every way calculated to make a most vivid impression. So susceptible was he of such impulses, and

CHAP. XIV.

1790.

so much under the control of the imaginative department of his intellect, that, whatever might have been the accidental mood of his mind, at the moment when this astounding event first burst upon him, it would most probably have acted as a sort of mental catalepsy, and fixed his reason in the very attitude in which it found it. He had, however, been prepared for the part which he now took by much more deep and grounded causes. It was rather from circumstances than from choice, or any natural affinity, that Mr. Burke had ever attached himself to the popular party in politics. There was, in truth, nothing democratic about him but his origin;—his tastes were all on the side of the splendid and the arbitrary. The chief recommendation of the cause of India to his fancy and his feelings was that it involved the fate of ancient dynasties, and invoked retribution for the downfall of thrones and princedoms, to which his imagination, always most affected by objects at a distance, lent a state and splendour that did not, in sober reality, belong to them. Though doomed to make Whiggism his habitual haunt, he took his perch at all times on its loftiest branches, as far as possible away from popular contact; and, upon most occasions, adopted a sort of baronial view of liberty, as rather a question lying between the Throne and the Aristocracy, than one in which

the people had a right to any efficient voice or agency. Accordingly, the question of Parliamentary Reform, from the first moment of its agitation, found in him a most decided opponent.

This inherent repugnance to popular principles became naturally heightened into impatience and disgust, by the long and fruitless warfare which he had waged under their banner, and the uniform ill success with which they had blasted all his struggles for wealth and power. Nor was he in any better temper with his associates in the cause,—having found that the ascendancy, which he had formerly exercised over them, and which, in some degree, consoled him for the want of official dominion, was of late considerably diminished, if not wholly transferred to others. Sheridan, as has been stated, was the most prominent object of his jealousy;—and it is curious to remark how much, even in feelings of this description, the aristocratical bias of his mind betrayed itself. For, though Mr. Fox, too, had overtaken and even passed him in the race, assuming that station in politics which he himself had previously held, yet so paramount did those claims of birth and connection, by which the new leader came recommended, appear in his eyes, that he submitted to be superseded by him, not only without a murmur, but

CHAP. XIV.

1790.

cheerfully. To Sheridan, however, who had no such hereditary passport to pre-eminence, he could not give way without heart-burning and humiliation; and to be supplanted thus by a rival son of earth seemed no less a shock to his superstitious notions about rank, than it was painful to his feelings of self-love and pride.

Such, as far as can be ascertained by a distant observer of those times, was the temper in which the first events of the Revolution found the mind of this remarkable man;—and, powerfully as they would, at any time, have appealed to his imagination and prejudices, the state of irritability to which he had been wrought by the causes already enumerated peculiarly predisposed him, at this moment, to give way to such impressions without restraint, and even to welcome, as a timely relief to his pride, the mighty vent thus afforded to the "*splendida bilis*" with which it was charged.

There was, indeed, much to animate and give a zest to the new part which he now took. He saw those principles, to which he owed a deep grudge, for the time and the talents he had wasted in their service, now embodied in a shape so wild and alarming, as seemed to justify him, on grounds of public safety, in turning against them the whole powers of his mind, and thus enabled him, opportunely, to dignify desertion,

by throwing the semblance of patriotism and conscientiousness round the reality of defection and revenge. He saw the party, too, who, from the moment they had ceased to be ruled by him, were associated only in his mind with recollections of unpopularity and defeat, about to adopt a line of politics which his long knowledge of the people of England, and his sagacious foresight of the consequences of the French Revolution, fully convinced him would lead to the same barren and mortifying results. On the contrary, the cause to which he proffered his alliance would, he was equally sure, by arraying on its side all the rank, riches, and religion of Europe, enable him at length to feel that sense of power and triumph, for which his domineering spirit had so long panted in vain. In this latter hope, indeed, of a speedy triumph over Jacobinism, his temperament, as was often the case, outran his sagacity; for, while he foresaw clearly that the dissolution of social order in France would at last harden into a military tyranny, he appeared not to be aware that the violent measures which he recommended against her would not only hasten this formidable result, but bind the whole mass of the people into union and resistance during the process.

Lastly—to these attractions of various kinds, with which the cause of Thrones was now en-

CHAP. XIV. 1790.

circled in the eyes of Burke, must be added one, which, however, it may still further disenchant our views of his conversion, cannot wholly be omitted among the inducements that led to it, —and this was the strong claim upon the gratitude of Government, which his seasonable and powerful advocacy in a crisis so difficult established for him, and which the narrow and embarrassed state of his circumstances rendered an object by no means of secondary importance in his views. Unfortunately—from a delicate wish, perhaps, that the reward should not appear to come in too close coincidence with the service—the pension bestowed upon him arrived too late to admit of his deriving much more from it than the obloquy by which it was accompanied.

The consequence, as is well known, of the new course taken by Burke was that the speeches and writings which he henceforward produced, and in which, as usual, his judgment was run away with by his temper, form a complete contrast, in spirit and tendency, to all that he had put on record in the former part of his life. He has thus left behind him two separate and distinct armouries of opinion, from which both Whig and Tory may furnish themselves with weapons, the most splendid, if not the most highly tempered, that ever Genius and Eloquence have

condescended to bequeath to Party. He has thus too, by his own personal versatility, attained in the world of politics, what Shakspeare, by the versatility of his characters, achieved for the world in general,—namely, such a universality of application to all opinions and purposes, that it would be difficult for any statesman of any party to find himself placed in any situation, for which he could not select some golden sentence from Burke, either to strengthen his position by reasoning, or illustrate and adorn it by fancy. While, therefore, our respect for the man himself is diminished by this want of moral identity observable through his life and writings, we are but the more disposed to admire that unrivalled genius, which could thus throw itself out in so many various directions with equal splendour and vigour. In general, political deserters lose their value and power in the very act, and bring little more than their treason to the new cause which they espouse:—

"*Fortis in armis*
Cæsaris Labienus erat; nunc transfuga vilis."

But Burke was mighty in either camp; and it would have taken *two* great men to effect what he, by this division of himself, achieved. His mind, indeed, lies parted asunder in his works,

like some vast continent severed by a convulsion of nature, — each portion peopled by its own giant race of opinions, differing altogether in features and language, and committed in eternal hostility with each other.

It was during the discussions on the Army Estimates, at the commencement of the Session of 1790, that the difference between Mr. Burke and his party in their views of the French Revolution first manifested itself. Mr. Fox having taken occasion to praise the late conduct of the French Guards in refusing to obey the dictates of the Court, and having declared that he exulted "both from feelings and from principles," in the political change that had been brought about in that country, Mr. Burke, in answering him, entered fully, and, it must be owned, most luminously into the question,—expressing his apprehension lest the example of France, which had, at a former period, threatened England with the contagion of despotism, should now be the means of introducing among her people the no less fatal taint of democracy and atheism. After some eloquent tributes of admiration to Mr. Fox, rendered more animated, perhaps, by the consciousness that they were the last offerings thrown into the open grave of their friendship, he proceeded to deprecate the effects which the language of his Right Honourable Friend might

have, in appearing to countenance the disposition observable among "some wicked persons" to "recommend an imitation of the French spirit of Reform," and then added a declaration, equally remarkable for the insidious charge which it implied against his own party, and the notice of his approaching desertion which it conveyed to the other,—that "so strongly opposed was he to any the least tendency towards the *means* of introducing a democracy like that of the French, as well as to the *end* itself, that, much as it would afflict him, if such a thing should be attempted, and that any friend of his could concur in such measures (he was far, very far, from believing they could), he would abandon his best friends, and join with his worst enemies to oppose either the means or the end."

It is pretty evident, from these words, that Burke had already made up his mind as to the course he should pursue, and but delayed his declaration of a total breach, in order to prepare the minds of the public for such an event, and, by waiting to take advantage of some moment of provocation, make the intemperance of others responsible for his own deliberate schism. The reply of Mr. Fox was not such as could afford this opportunity;—it was, on the contrary, full of candour and moderation, and repelled the implied charge of being a favourer of the new

doctrines of France in the most decided but, at the same time, most conciliatory terms.

"Did such a declaration," he asked, "warrant the idea that he was a friend to Democracy? He declared himself equally the enemy of all absolute forms of government, whether an absolute Monarchy, an absolute Aristocracy, or an absolute Democracy. He was adverse to all extremes, and a friend only to a mixed government like our own, in which, if the Aristocracy, or indeed either of the three branches of the Constitution, were destroyed, the good effect of the whole and the happiness derived under it would, in his mind, be at an end."

In returning, too, the praises bestowed upon him by his friend, he made the following memorable and noble acknowledgment of all that he himself had gained by their intercourse:—

"Such (he said) was his sense of the judgment of his Right Honourable Friend, such his knowledge of his principles, such the value which he set upon them, and such the estimation in which he held his friendship, that if he were to put all the political information which he had learned from books, all which he had gained from science, and all which any knowledge of the world and its affairs had taught him, into one scale, and the improvement which he had derived from his Right Honourable Friend's instruction and conversation were placed in the other, he should be at a loss to decide to which to give the preference."

This, from a person so rich in acquirements as Mr. Fox, was the very highest praise;—nor,

except in what related to the judgment and principles of his friend, was it at all exaggerated. The conversation of Burke must have been like the procession of a Roman triumph, exhibiting power and riches at every step — occasionally, perhaps, mingling the low Fescennine jest with the lofty music of its march, but glittering all over with the spoils of the whole ransacked world.

Mr. Burke, in reply, after reiterating his praises of Mr. Fox, and the full confidence which he felt in his moderation and sagacity, professed himself perfectly satisfied with the explanations that had been given. The conversation would thus have passed off without any explosion, had not Sheridan, who was well aware that against him, in particular, the charge of a tendency to the adoption of French principles was directed, risen immediately after, and by a speech warmly in favour of the Revolution and of the National Assembly, at once lighted the train in the mind of Burke, and brought the question, as far as regarded themselves, to an immediate issue.

" He differed," he said, " decidedly, from his Right Honourable Friend in almost every word that he had uttered respecting the French Revolution. He conceived it to be as just a Revolution as ours, proceeding upon as

CHAP. XIV.

1790.

sound a principle and as just a provocation. He vehemently defended the general views and conduct of the National Assembly. He could not even understand what was meant by the charges against them of having overturned the laws, the justice, and the revenues of their country. What were their laws? the arbitrary mandates of capricious despotism. What their justice? the partial adjudications of venal magistrates. What their revenues? national bankruptcy. This he thought the fundamental error of his Right Honourable Friend's argument, that he accused the National Assembly of creating the evils, which they had found existing in full deformity at the first hour of their meeting. The public creditor had been defrauded; the manufacturer was without employ; trade was languishing; famine clung upon the poor; despair on all. In this situation, the wisdom and feelings of the nation were appealed to by the government; and was it to be wondered at by Englishmen, that a people, so circumstanced, should search for the cause and source of all their calamities, or that they should find them in the arbitrary constitution of their government, and in the prodigal and corrupt administration of their revenues? For such an evil, when proved, what remedy could be resorted to, but a radical amendment of the frame and fabric of the Constitution itself? This change was not the object and wish of the National Assembly only; it was the claim and cry of all France, united as one man for one purpose."

All this is just and unanswerable—as indeed was the greater part of the sentiments which he uttered. But he seems to have failed, even more signally than Mr. Fox, in endeavouring to

invalidate the masterly view which Burke had just taken of the Revolution of 1688, as compared, in its means and object, with that of France. There was, in truth, but little similarity between them,—the task of the former being to preserve liberty, that of the latter to destroy tyranny; the one being a regulated movement of the Aristocracy against the Throne for the Nation, the other a tumultuous rising of the whole Nation against both for itself.

The reply of Mr. Burke was conclusive and peremptory,—such, in short, as might be expected from a person, who came prepared to take the first plausible opportunity of a rupture. He declared that "henceforth, his Honourable Friend and he were separated in politics."—complained that his arguments had been cruelly misrepresented, and that "the Honourable Gentleman had thought proper to charge him with being the advocate of despotism." Having endeavoured to defend himself from such an imputation, he concluded by saying,—

"Was that a fair and candid mode of treating his arguments? or was it what he ought to have expected *in the moment of departed friendship?* On the contrary, was it not evident that the Honourable Gentleman had made a sacrifice of his friendship, for the sake of catching some momentary popularity? If the fact were such, even greatly as he should continue to admire the Honourable

CHAP. XIV.

1790.

Gentleman's talents, he must tell him that his argument was chiefly an argument *ad invidiam*, and all the applause for which he could hope from clubs was scarcely worth the sacrifice which he had chosen to make for so insignificant an acquisition."

I have given the circumstances of this Debate somewhat in detail, not only on account of its own interest and of the share which Mr. Sheridan took in it, but from its being the first scene of that great political schism, which in the following year assumed a still more serious aspect, and by which the policy of Mr. Pitt at length acquired a predominance, not speedily to be forgotten in the annals of this country.

Mr. Sheridan was much blamed for the unseasonable stimulant, which, it was thought, his speech on this occasion had administered to the temper of Burke; nor can it be doubted that he had thereby, in some degree, accelerated the public burst of that feeling which had so long been treasured up against himself. But, whether hastened or delayed, such a breach was ultimately inevitable; the divergence of the parties once begun, it was in vain to think of restoring their parallelism. That some of their friends, however, had more sanguine hopes appears from an effort which was made, within two days after the occurrence of this remarkable scene, to effect a reconciliation between Burke and Sheridan.

The interview that took place on that occasion is thus described by Mr. Dennis O'Brien, one of the persons chiefly instrumental in the arrangements for it :—

" It appeared to the author of this pamphlet * that the difference between these two great men would be a great evil to the country and to their own party. Full of this persuasion he brought them both together the second night after the original contest in the House of Commons; and carried them to Burlington House to Mr. Fox and the Duke of Portland, according to a previous arrangement. This interview, which can never be forgotten by those who were present, lasted from ten o'clock at night until three in the morning, and afforded a very remarkable display of the extraordinary talents of the parties."

It will easily be believed that to the success of this conciliatory effort the temper on one side would be a greater obstacle than even the hate on both. Mr. Sheridan, as if anxious to repel from himself the suspicion of having contributed to its failure, took an opportunity, during his speech upon the Tobacco Act, in the month of April following, to express himself in the most friendly terms of Mr. Burke, as " one, for whose talents and personal virtue he had the highest esteem, veneration, and regard, and with whom

* Entitled " Utrum Horum."

CHAP. XIV. 1790.

he might be allowed to differ in opinion upon the subject of France, persuaded as he was that they never could differ in principle." Of this and some other compliments of a similar nature, Mr. Burke did not deign to take the slightest notice — partly, from an implacable feeling towards him who offered them, and partly, perhaps, from a suspicion that they were intended rather for the ears of the public than his own, and that, while this tendency to conciliation appeared on the surface, the under-current of feeling and influence set all the other way.

Among the measures which engaged the attention of Mr. Sheridan during this session, the principal was a motion of his own for the repeal of the Excise Duties on Tobacco, which appears to have called forth a more than usual portion of his oratory,—his speeches upon the subject occupying nearly forty pages. It is upon topics of this unpromising kind, and from the very effort, perhaps, to dignify and enliven them, that the peculiar characteristics of an orator are sometimes most racily brought out. To the Cyder Tax we are indebted for one of the grandest bursts of the constitutional spirit and eloquence of Lord Chatham; and, in these orations of Sheridan upon Tobacco, we find examples of the two extreme varieties of his dramatic talent— both of the broad, natural humour of his farce,

and the pointed, artificial wit of his comedy. For instance, in representing, as one of the abuses that might arise from the discretionary power of remitting fines to manufacturers, the danger that those only should feel the indulgence, who were found to be supporters of the existing administration*, he says: —

"Where a man, whose stock had increased or diminished beyond the standard table in the Act, to attend the Commissioners, and assure them that the weather alone had caused the increase or decrease of the article, and that no fraud whatever had been used on the occasion, the Commissioners might say to him, 'Sir, you need not give yourself so much trouble to prove your innocence; — we see honesty in your orange cape.' But should a person of quite a different side in politics attend for the same purpose, the Commissioners might say, 'Sir, you are not to be believed; we see fraud in your blue and buff, and it is impossible that you should not be a smuggler.'"

Again, in stating the case between the manufacturers and the Minister, the former of whom objected to the Bill altogether, while the latter determined to preserve its principle and only alter its form, he says: —

"The manufacturers ask the Right Honourable Gentleman, if he will consent to give up the principle? The

* A case of this kind formed the subject of a spirited speech of Mr. Windham, in 1792. See his Speeches, vol. i. p. 207.

Right Honourable Gentleman answers, 'No; the principle must not be abandoned, but do you inform me how I shall alter the Bill.' This the manufacturers refused; and they wisely refused it in his opinion; for, what was it but the Minister's saying, 'I have a yoke to put about your necks,—do you help me in fitting it on—only assist me with your knowledge of the subject, and I'll fit you with the prettiest pair of fetters that ever were seen in the world.'"

As a specimen of his quaint and far sought witticisms, the following passage in the same speech may vie with Trip's "Post-Obit on the blue and silver, &c."—Having described the effects of the weather in increasing or decreasing the weight of the stock, beyond the exact standard established in the Act, he adds,

"The Commissioners, before they could, in justice, levy such fines, ought to ascertain that the weather is always in that precise state of heat or cold which the Act supposed it would be. They ought to make Christmas give security for frost, take a bond for hot weather from August, and oblige damps and fogs to take out permits."

It was in one of these speeches on the Tobacco Act, that he adverted with considerable warmth to a rumour, which, he complained, had been maliciously circulated, of a misunderstanding between himself and the Duke of Portland, in consequence (as the Report expresses it) of "a

certain opposition affirmed to have been made by this Noble Duke, to some views or expectations which he (Mr. Sheridan) was said to have entertained." After declaring that "there was not in these rumours one grain of truth," he added that —

> "He would not venture to state to the Committee the opinion that the Noble Duke was pleased to entertain of him, lest he should be accused of vanity in publishing what he might deem highly flattering. All that he would assert on this occasion was, that if he had it in his power to make the man whose good opinion he should most highly prize think flatteringly of him, he would have that man think of him precisely as the Noble Duke did, and then his wish on that subject would be most amply gratified."

As it is certain, that the feelings which Burke entertained towards Sheridan were in some degree shared by all those who afterwards seceded from the party, this boast of the high opinion of the Duke of Portland must be taken with what, in Heraldry, is called *Abatement*—that is, a certain degree of diminution of the emblazonry.

Among the papers of Mr. Sheridan, I find a letter addressed to him this year by one of his most distinguished friends, relative to the motions that had lately been brought forward for the relief of the Dissenters. The writer, whose alarm for the interest of the Church had some-

CHAP. XIV.

1790.

what disturbed his sense of liberality and justice, endeavours to impress upon Mr. Sheridan, and through him upon Mr. Fox, how undeserving the Dissenters were, as a political body, of the recent exertions on their behalf, and how ungratefully they had more than once requited the services which the Whigs had rendered them. For this latter charge there was but too much foundation in truth, however ungenerous might be the deduction which the writer would draw from it. It is, no doubt, natural that large bodies of men, impatiently suffering under the ban of disqualification, should avail themselves, without much regard to persons or party, of every aid they can muster for their cause, and should (to use the words of an old Earl of Pembroke) "lean on both sides of the stairs to get up." But, it is equally natural that the occasional desertion and ingratitude, of which, in pursuit of this selfish policy, they are but too likely to be guilty towards their best friends, should, if not wholly indispose the latter to their service, at least considerably moderate their zeal in a cause, where all parties alike seem to be considered but as instruments, and where neither personal predilections nor principle are regarded in the choice of means. To the great credit, however, of the Whig party, it must be said, that, though often set aside and even disowned by their

clients, they have rarely suffered their high duty, as advocates, to be relaxed or interrupted by such momentary suspensions of confidence. In this respect, the cause of Ireland has more than once been a trial of their constancy. Even Lord North was able, by his reluctant concessions, to supersede them for a time in the favour of my too believing countrymen, — whose despair of finding justice at any hands has often led them thus to carry their confidence to market, and to place it in the hands of the first plausible bidder. The many vicissitudes of popularity which their own illustrious Whig, Grattan, had to encounter, would have wearied out the ardour of any less magnanimous champion. But high minds are as little affected by such unworthy returns for services, as the sun is by those fogs which the earth throws up between herself and his light.

With respect to the Dissenters, they had deserted Mr. Fox in his great struggle with the Crown in 1784, and laid their interest and hopes at the feet of the new idol of the day. Notwithstanding this, we find him, in the year 1787, warmly maintaining, and in opposition to his rival, the cause of the very persons who had contributed to make that rival triumphant, — and showing just so much remembrance of their late defection as served to render this sacrifice of personal to public feelings more signal. "He

was determined," he said, "to let them know that, though they could upon some occasions lose sight of their principles of liberty, he would not upon any occasion lose sight of his principles of toleration." In the present session too, notwithstanding that the great organ of the Dissenters, Dr. Price, had lately in a sermon, published with a view to the Test, made a pointed attack on the morals of Mr. Fox and his friends, this generous advocate of religious liberty not the less promptly acceded to the request of the body, that he would himself bring the motion for their relief before the House.

On the 12th of June, the Parliament was dissolved,—and Mr. Sheridan again succeeded in being elected for Stafford. The following letters, however, addressed to him by Mrs. Sheridan during the election, will prove that they were not without some apprehensions of a different result. The letters are still more interesting, as showing how warmly alive to each other's feelings the hearts of both husband and wife could remain, after the long lapse of near twenty years, and after trials more fatal to love than even time itself.

"This letter will find you, my dear Dick, I hope, encircled with honours at Stafford. I take it for granted you entered it triumphantly on

Sunday,—but I am very impatient to hear the particulars, and of the utter discomfiture of S— and his followers. I received your note from Birmingham this morning, and am happy to find that you and my dear cub were well, so far on your journey. You could not be happier than I should be in the proposed alteration for Tom, but we will talk more of this when we meet. I sent you Cartwright yesterday, and to-day I pack you off Perry with the soldiers. I was obliged to give them four guineas for their expenses. I send you likewise, by Perry, the note from Mrs. Crewe, to enable you to speak of your qualification if you should be called upon. So I think I have executed all your commissions, sir; and if you want any of these doubtful votes which I mentioned to you, you will have time enough to send for them, for I would not let them go till I hear they can be of any use.

"And, now for my journal, sir, which I suppose you expect. Saturday, I was at home all day busy for you, — kept Mrs. Reid to dinner, — went to the Opera, — afterwards to Mrs. St. John's, where I lost my money sadly, sir, — eat strawberries and cream for supper,—sat between Lord Salisbury and Mr. Meynell, (hope you approve of that, sir,)— overheard Lord Salisbury advise Miss Boyle by no means to

CHAP. XIV. 1790.

subscribe to Taylor's Opera, as O'Reilly's would certainly have the patent, — confess I did not come home till past two. Sunday, called on Lady Julia,—father and Mr. Reid to dinner,—in the evening at Lady Hampden's,—lost my money again, sir, and came home by one o'clock. 'Tis now near one o'clock,—my father is established in my boudoir, and, when I have finished this, I am going with him to hear Abbé Vogler play on the Stafford organ. I have promised to dine with Mrs. Crewe, who is to have a female party only, — no objection to that, I suppose, sir? Whatever the party do, I shall do of course,—I suppose it will end in Mrs. Hobart's. Mr. James told me on Saturday, and I find it is the report of the day, that Bond Hopkins is gone to Stafford. I am sorry to tell you there is an opposition at York,—Mr. Montague opposes Sir William Milner. Mr. Beckford has given up at Dover, and Lord * * is so provoked at it, that he has given up too, though they say they were both sure. St. Ives is gone for want of a candidate. Mr. Barham is beat at Stockbridge. Charles Lenox has offered for Surry, and they say Lord Egremont might drive him to the deuce, if he would set any body up against him. You know, I suppose, Mr. Crewe has likewise an opponent. I am sorry to tell you all this bad news, and, to complete it, Mr.

Adam is sick in bed, and there is nobody to do any good left in town.

"I am more than ever convinced we must look to other resources for wealth and independence, and consider politics merely as an amusement,—and in that light 'tis best to be in Opposition, which I am afraid we are likely to be for some years again.

"I see the rumours of war still continue—Stocks continue to fall—is that good or bad for the Ministers? The little boys are come home to me to-day. I could not help shewing in my answer to Mr. T.'s letter, that I was hurt at his conduct, — so I have got another flummery letter, and the boys, who (as he is pretty sure) will be the best peace-makers. God bless you, my dear Dick. I am very well, I assure you, pray don't neglect to write to your ever affectionate

"E. S."

"My dearest Dick, Wednesday.

"I am full of anxiety and fright about you, —I cannot but think your letters are very alarming. Deuce take the Corporation! is it impossible to make them resign their pretensions, and make peace with the Burgesses? I have sent Thomas after Mr. Cocker. I suppose you

CHAP. XIV. 1790.

have sent for the out-votes; but, if they are not good, what a terrible expense will that be!—however, they are ready. I saw Mr. Cocker yesterday,—he collected them together last night, and gave them a treat,—so they are in high good humour. I inclose you a letter which B. left here last night,—I could not resist opening it. Every thing seems going wrong, I think. I thought he was not to do any thing in your absence.—It strikes me the bad business he mentions was entirely owing to his own stupidity, and want of a little patience,—is it of much consequence? I don't hear that the report is true of Basilico's arrival;—a messenger came to the Spanish embassy, which gave rise to this tale, I believe.

"If you were not so worried, I should scold you for the conclusion of your letter to-day. Might not I as well accuse you of coldness, for not filling your letter with professions, at a time when your head must be full of business? I think of nothing all day long, but how to do good, some how or other, for you. I have given you a regular Journal of my time, and all to please you,—so don't, dear Dick, lay so much stress on words. I should use them oftener, perhaps, but I feel as if it would look like deceit. You know me well enough to be sure that I can

never do what I'm bid, sir;—but, pray, don't think I meant to send you a cold letter, for in deed nothing was ever farther from my heart.

"You will see Mr. Horne Tooke's advertisement to-day in the papers;—what do you think of that to complete the thing? Bishop Dixon has just called from the hustings:—he says, the late Recorder, Adair, proposed Charles with a good speech, and great applause,—Captain Berkeley, Lord Hood with a bad speech, not much applauded; and then Horne Tooke came forward, and, in the most impudent speech that ever was heard, proposed himself,—abused both the candidates, and said he should have been ashamed to have sat and heard such ill-deserved praises given him. But he told the crowd that, since so many of these fine virtues and qualifications had never yet done them the least good, they might as well now choose a candidate without them. He said, however, that if they were sincere in their professions of standing alone, he was sure of coming in, for they must all give him their second votes. There was an amazing deal of laughing and noise in the course of his speech. Charles Fox attempted to answer him, and so did Lord Hood,—but they would hear neither, and they are now polling away.

"Do, my dearest love, if you have possibly time, write me a few more particulars, for your

CHAP. XIV. 1790.

letters are very unsatisfactory, and I am full of anxiety. Make Richardson write,—what has he better to do? God bless thee, my dear, dear, Dick,—would it were over and all well! I am afraid, at any rate, it will be ruinous work.

"Ever your true and affectionate

"E. S."

"*Near five.* I have just come from the hustings:—the state of the poll when I left it was, Fox, 260; Hood, 75; Horne Tooke, 17! But he still persists in his determination of polling a man an hour for the whole time. I saw Mr. Wilkes go up to vote for Tooke and Hood, amidst the hisses and groans of a multitude."

"Friday.

"My poor Dick, how you are worried! This is the day,—you will easily guess how anxious I shall be; but you seem pretty sanguine yourself, which is my only comfort, for Richardson's letter is rather croaking. You have never said a word of little Monkton:—has he any chance, or none? I ask questions without considering that, before you receive this, every thing will be decided—I hope triumphantly for you. What a sad set of venal rascals your favourites the Blacks must be, to turn so suddenly from their professions and promises! I am half sorry you

have any thing more to do with them, and more than ever regret you did not stand for Westminster with Charles instead of Lord John; —in that case you would have come in now, and we should not have been persecuted by this Horne Tooke. However, it is the dullest contested election that ever was seen—no canvassing, no houses open, no cockades. But I heard that a report prevails now, that Horne Tooke polling so few the two or three first days, is an artful trick to put the others off their guard, and that he means to pour in his votes on the last days, when it will be too late for them to repair their neglect. But I don't think it possible, either, for such a fellow to beat Charles in Westminster.

"I have just had a note from Reid—he is at Canterbury:—the state of the poll there, Thursday night, was as follows:— Gipps, 220; Lord * *, 211; Sir T. Honeywood, 216; Mr. Warton, 163. We have got two members for Wendover, and two at Ailsbury. Mr. Barham is beat at Stockbridge. Mr. Tierney says he shall be beat owing to Bate Dudley's manœuvres, and the Dissenters having all forsaken him,—a set of ungrateful wretches. E. Fawkener has just sent me a state of the poll at Northampton, as it stood yesterday, when they adjourned to dinner:— Lord Compton, 160; Bouverie, 98;

CHAP. XIV. 1790.

Colonel Manners, 72. They are in hopes Mr. Manners will give up. This is all my news, sir.

"We had a very pleasant musical party last night at Lord Erskine's, where I supped. I am asked to dine to-day with Lady Palmerston, at Sheen; but I can't go, unless Mrs. Crewe will carry me, as the coach is gone to have its new lining. I have sent to ask her, for 'tis a fine day, and I should like it very well. God thee bless, my dear Dick.

"Yours ever, true and affectionate,

"E. S.

"Duke of Portland has just left me:—he is full of anxiety about you:—this is the second time he has called to enquire."

Having secured his own election, Mr. Sheridan now hastened to lend his aid, where such a lively reinforcement was much wanted, on the hustings at Westminster. The contest here was protracted to the 2d of July; and it required no little exercise both of wit and temper to encounter the cool personalities of Tooke, who had not forgotten the severe remarks of Sheridan upon his pamphlet the preceding year, and who, in addition to his strong powers of sarcasm, had all those advantages, which, in such a contest, contempt for the courtesies and compromises of

party warfare gives. Among other sallies of his splenetic humour it is related, that Mr. Fox having, upon one occasion, retired from the hustings, and left to Sheridan the task of addressing the multitude, Tooke remarked, that such was always the practice of quack-doctors, who, whenever they quit the stage themselves, make it a rule to leave their merry-andrews behind.*

The French Revolution still continued, by its comet-like course, to dazzle, alarm, and disturb all Europe. Mr. Burke had published his celebrated "Reflections" in the month of November, 1790; and never did any work, with the exception, perhaps, of the Eikon Basilike, produce such a rapid, deep, and general sensation. The Eikon was the book of a King, and this might, in another sense, be called the Book of Kings. Not only in England, but throughout all Europe, — in every part of which monarchy was now trembling for its existence, — this lofty appeal to loyalty was heard and welcomed. Its effect upon the already tottering Whig party was like that of "the Voice," in the Ruins of Rome, "disparting towers." The whole fabric

* Tooke, it is said, upon coming one Monday morning to the hustings, was thus addressed by a partizan of his opponent, not of a very reputable character: — "Well, Mr. Tooke, you will have all the blackguards with you to-day." — "I am delighted to hear it, sir," said Tooke, bowing, "and from such good authority."

CHAP. XIV. 1791.

of the old Rockingham confederacy shook to its base. Even some who afterwards recovered their equilibrium, at first yielded to the eloquence of this extraordinary book, — which, like the æra of chivalry, whose loss it deplores, mixes a grandeur with error, and throws a charm round political superstition, that will long render its pages a sort of region of Royal romance, to which fancy will have recourse for illusions that have lost their last hold on the reason.

The undisguised freedom with which Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan expressed every where their opinions of this work and its principles had, of course, no small influence on the temper of the author, and, while it confirmed him in his hatred and jealousy of the one, prepared him for the breach which he meditated with the other. This breach was now, indeed, daily expected, as a natural sequel to the rupture with Mr. Sheridan in the last session; but, by various accidents and interpositions, the crisis was delayed till the 6th of May, when the recommitment of the Quebec Bill, — a question, upon which both orators had already taken occasion to unfold their views of the French Revolution, — furnished Burke with an opportunity, of which he impetuously took advantage, to sever the tie between himself and Mr. Fox for ever.

This scene,—so singular in a public assembly, where the natural affections are but seldom called out, and where, though bursts of temper like that of Burke are common, such tears as those shed by Mr. Fox are rare phænomena,—has been so often described in various publications, that it would be superfluous to enter into the details of it here. The following are the solemn and stern words in which sentence of death was pronounced upon a friendship, that had now lasted for more than the fourth part of a century. "It certainly," said Mr. Burke, "was indiscretion at any period, but especially at his time of life, to provoke enemies, or to give his friends occasion to desert him; yet, if his firm and steady adherence to the British Constitution placed him in such a dilemma, he would risk all, and, as public duty and public prudence taught him, with his last words exclaim, 'Fly from the French Constitution.'" [Mr. Fox here whispered, that "there was no loss of friendship."] Mr. Burke said, "Yes, there *was* a loss of friendship;—he knew the price of his conduct;—he had done his duty at the price of his friend;—their friendship was at an end."

In rising to reply to the speech of Burke, Mr. Fox was so affected as to be, for some moments, unable to speak:—he wept, it is said, even to

CHAP. XIV. 1791.

sobbing; and persons who were in the gallery at the time declare, that, while he spoke, there was hardly a dry eye around them.

Had it been possible for two natures, so incapable of disguise—the one from simplicity and frankness, the other from ungovernable temper, —to have continued in relations of amity, notwithstanding their disagreement upon a question, which was at that moment setting the world in arms, both themselves and the country would have been the better for such a compromise between them. Their long habits of mutual deference would have mingled with and moderated the discussion of their present differences;— the tendency to one common centre to which their minds had been accustomed, would have prevented them from flying so very widely asunder; and both might have been thus saved from those extremes of principle, which Mr. Burke always, and Mr. Fox sometimes, had recourse to in defending their respective opinions, and which, by lighting, as it were, the torch at both ends, but hastened a conflagration in which liberty herself might have been the sufferer. But it was evident that such a compromise would have been wholly impossible. Even granting that Mr. Burke did not welcome the schism as a relief, neither the temper of the men nor the spirit of the times, which converted opinions at

once into passions, would have admitted of such a peaceable counterbalance of principles, nor suffered them long to slumber in that hollow truce, which Tacitus has described,—"*manente in speciem amicitia.*" Mr. Sheridan saw this from the first; and, in hazarding that vehement speech, by which he provoked the rupture between himself and Burke, neither his judgment nor his temper were so much off their guard as they who blamed that speech seemed inclined to infer. But, perceiving that a separation was in the end inevitable, he thought it safer, perhaps, as well as manlier, to encounter the extremity at once, than by any temporising delay, or too complaisant suppression of opinion, to involve both himself and Mr. Fox in the suspicion of either sharing or countenancing that spirit of defection, which, he saw, was fast spreading among the rest of their associates.

It is indeed said, and with every appearance of truth, that Mr. Sheridan had felt offended by the censures which some of his political friends had pronounced upon the indiscretion (as it was called) of his speech in the last year, and that, having, in consequence, withdrawn from them the aid of his powerful talents during a great part of the present session, he but returned to his post under the express condition, that he should be allowed to take the earliest opportu-

CHAP. XIV. 1791.

nity of repeating, fully and explicitly, the same avowal of his sentiments.

The following letter from Doctor Parr to Mrs. Sheridan, written immediately after the scene between Burke and Sheridan in the preceding year, is curious :—

" DEAR MADAM,

" I am most fixedly and most indignantly on the side of Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Fox against Mr. Burke. It is not merely French politics that produced this dispute ;—they might have been settled privately. No, no,—there is jealousy lurking underneath ;—jealousy of Mr. Sheridan's eloquence ;—jealousy of his popularity ;—jealousy of his influence with Mr. Fox ;—jealousy, perhaps, of his connection with the Prince.

" Mr. Sheridan was, I think, not too warm ; or, at least, I should have myself been warmer. Why, Burke accused Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan of acts leading to rebellion,—and he made Mr. Fox a dupe, and Mr. Sheridan a traitor! I think *this*,—and I am sure, yes, positively sure, that nothing else will allay the ferment of men's minds. Mr. Sheridan ought, publicly in Parliament, to demand proof, or a retraction, of this horrible charge. Pitt's words never did the party half the hurt ;—and, just on the eve of an

election, it is worse. As to private bickerings, or private concessions and reconciliations, they are all nothing. In public all must be again taken up; for, if drowned, the Public will say, and Pitt will insinuate, that the charge is well founded, and that they dare not provoke an enquiry.

"I know Burke is not addicted to giving up, —and so much the worse for him and his party. As to Mr. Fox's yielding, well had it been for all, all, all the party, if Mr. Fox had, now and then, stood out against Mr. Burke. The ferment and alarm are universal, and something must be done; — for it is a conflagration in which they must perish, unless it be stopped. All the papers are with Burke,—even the Foxite papers, which I have seen. I know his violence, and temper, and obstinacy of opinion, and—but I will not speak out, for, though I think him the greatest man upon the earth, yet, in politics I think him,—what he has been found, to the sorrow of those who act with him. He is uncorrupt, I know; but his passions are quite headstrong;* and age, and disappointment, and the sight of other men rising into

* It was well said (I believe, by Mr. Fox,) that it was lucky both for Burke and Windham that they took the Royal side on the subject of the French Revolution, as they would have got hanged on the other.

CHAP. XIV. 1791.

fame and consequence, sour him. Pray tell me when they are reconciled,—though, as I said, it is nothing to the purpose without a public explanation. I am, dear Madam,

"Yours truly,

"S. PARR."

Another letter, communicated to me as having been written about this period to Sheridan by a gentleman, then abroad, who was well acquainted with the whole party, contains allusions to the breach, which make its introduction here not irrelevant:—

"I wish very much to have some account of the state of things with you that I can rely on. I wish to know how all my old companions and fellow-labourers do; if the Club yet exists; if you and Richardson, and Lord John, and Ellis, and Lawrence, and Fitzpatrick, &c. meet, and joke, and write as of old. What is become of Becket's, and the supper-parties,—the *noctes cœnæque?* Poor Burgoyne! I am sure you all mourned him as I did, particularly Richardson: —pray remember me affectionately to Richardson. It is a shame for you all, and I will say ungrateful in many of you, to have so totally forgotten me, and to leave me in ignorance of every thing public and private in which I am

interested. The only creature who writes to me is the Duke of Portland; but in the great and weighty occupations that engross his mind, you can easily conceive that the little details of our Society cannot enter into His Grace's correspondence. I have indeed carried on a pretty regular correspondence with young Burke. But that is now at an end. *He* is so wrapt up in the importance of his present pursuits, that it is too great an honour for me to continue to correspond with him. His father I ever must venerate and ever love; yet I never could admire, even in him, what his son has inherited from him, a tenacity of opinion and a violence of *principle*, that makes him lose his friendships in his politics, and quarrel with every one who differs from him. Bitterly have I lamented that greatest of these quarrels, and, indeed, the only important one: nor can I conceive it to have been less afflicting to my private feelings than fatal to the party. The worst of it to me was, that I was obliged to condemn the man I loved, and that all the warmth of my affection, and the zeal of my partiality, could not suggest a single excuse to vindicate him, either to the world or to myself, from the crime (for such it was) of giving such a triumph to the common enemy. He failed, too, in what I most loved him for,—his heart. There it was that *Mr. Fox princi-*

CHAP. XIV. 1791.

pally rose above him; nor, amiable as he ever has been, did he ever appear half so amiable as on that trying occasion."

The topic upon which Sheridan most distinguished himself during this Session was the meditated interference of England in the war between Russia and the Porte,—one of the few measures of Mr. Pitt on which the sense of the nation was opposed to him. So unpopular, indeed, was the Armament, proposed to be raised for this object, and so rapidly did the majority of the Minister diminish during the discussion of it, that there appeared for some time a probability that the Whig party would be called into power,—an event which, happening at this critical juncture, might, by altering the policy of England, have changed the destinies of all Europe.

The circumstance to which at present this Russian question owes its chief hold upon English memories is the charge, arising out of it, brought against Mr. Fox of having sent Mr. Adair as his representative to Petersburgh, for the purpose of frustrating the objects for which the King's ministers were then actually negotiating. This accusation, though more than once obliquely intimated during the discussions upon the Russian Armament in 1791, first met the

public eye, in any tangible form, among those celebrated Articles of Impeachment against Mr. Fox, which were drawn up by Burke's practised hand* in 1793, and found their way surreptitiously into print in 1797. The angry and vindictive tone of this paper was but little calculated to inspire confidence in its statements, and the charge again died away, unsupported and unrefuted, till the appearance of the Memoirs of Mr. Pitt by the Bishop of Winchester; when, upon the authority of documents said to be found among the papers of Mr. Pitt, but not produced, the accusation was revived,—the Right Reverend biographer calling in aid of his own view of the transaction the charitable opinion of the Turks, who, he complacently assures us, "expressed great surprise that Mr. Fox had not lost his head for such conduct." Notwithstanding, however, this *Concordat* between the Right Reverend Prelate and the Turks, something more is still wanting to give validity to so serious an accusation. Until the production of the alleged proofs (which Mr. Adair has confidently demanded) shall have put the public in posses-

* This was the third time that his talent for impeaching was exercised, as he acknowledged having drawn up, during the administration of Lord North, seven distinct Articles of Impeachment against that nobleman, which, however, the advice of Lord Rockingham induced him to relinquish.

CHAP. XIV. 1791.

sion of more recondite materials for judging, they must regard as satisfactory and conclusive the refutation of the whole charge, both as regards himself and his illustrious friend, which Mr. Adair has laid before the world; and for the truth of which not only his own high character, but the character of the ministries of both parties, who have since employed him in missions of the first trust and importance, seem to offer the strongest and most convincing pledges.

The Empress of Russia, in testimony of her admiration of the eloquence of Mr. Fox on this occasion, sent an order to England, through her ambassador, for a bust of that statesman, which it was her intention, she said, to place between those of Demosthenes and Cicero. The following is a literal copy of Her Imperial Majesty's note on the subject*:—

" Ecrivés au Cte. Worenzof qu'il me fasse avoir en marbre blanc le Buste resemblant de Charle Fox. Je veut le mettre sur ma Colonade entre eux de Demosthene et Ciceron.

" Il a delivré par son eloquence sa Patrie et

* Found among Mr. Sheridan's papers, with these words in his own hand-writing, annexed:—" N. B. Fox would have lost it, if I had not made him look for it, and taken a copy."

la Russie d'une guerre à la quelle il n'y avoit ni justice ni raisons."

Another subject that engaged much of the attention of Mr. Sheridan this year was his own motion relative to the constitution of the Royal Scotch Boroughs. He had been, singularly enough, selected, in the year 1787, by the Burgesses of Scotland, in preference to so many others possessing more personal knowledge of that country, to present to the House the Petition of the Convention of Delegates, for a Reform of the internal government of the Royal Boroughs. How fully satisfied they were with his exertions in their cause may be judged by the following extract from the Minutes of Convention, dated 11th August, 1791 :—

"Mr. Mills, of Perth, after a suitable introductory speech, moved a vote of thanks to Mr. Sheridan, in the following words:—

"The Delegates of the Burgesses of Scotland, associated for the purposes of Reform, taking into their most serious consideration the important services rendered to their cause by the manly and prudent exertions of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Esq., the genuine and fixed attachment to it which the whole tenor of his conduct has evinced, and the admirable moderation he has all along displayed,

"Resolved unanimously, That the most sincere thanks of this meeting be given to the said Richard Brinsley

CHAP. XIV.

1791.

Sheridan, Esq., for his steady, honourable, and judicious conduct in bringing the question relative to the violated rights of the Scottish Boroughs to its present important and favourable crisis; and the Burgesses with firm confidence hope that, from his attachment to the cause, which he has shown to be deeply rooted in principle, he will persevere to exert his distinguished abilities, till the objects of it are obtained, with that inflexible firmness, and constitutional moderation, which have appeared so conspicuous and exemplary throughout the whole of his conduct, as to be highly deserving of the imitation of all good citizens.

"JOHN EWEN, Secretary."

From a private letter written this year by one of the Scottish Delegates to a friend of Mr. Sheridan, (a copy of which letter I have found among the papers of the latter,) it appears that the disturbing effects of Mr. Burke's book had already shewn themselves so strongly among the Whig party as to fill the writer with apprehensions of their defection, even on the safe and moderate question of Scotch Reform. He mentions one distinguished member of the party, who afterwards stood conspicuously in the very van of the Opposition, but who at that moment, if the authority of the letter may be depended upon, was, like others, under the spell of the great Alarmist, and yielding rapidly to the influence of that anti-revolutionary terror, which like the Panic dignified by the ancients with the

name of one of their Gods, will be long associated in the memories of Englishmen with the mighty name and genius of Burke. A consultation was, however, held among this portion of the party, with respect to the prudence of lending their assistance to the measure of Scotch Reform; and Sir James Mackintosh, as I have heard him say, was in company with Sheridan, when Dr. Lawrence came direct from the meeting, to inform him that they had agreed to support his motion.

The state of the Scotch Representation is one of those cases, where a dread of the ulterior objects of Reform induces many persons to oppose its first steps, however beneficial and reasonable they may deem them, rather than risk a further application of the principle, or open a breach by which a bolder spirit of innovation may enter. As it is, there is no such thing as popular election in Scotland. We cannot, indeed, more clearly form to ourselves a notion of the manner in which so important a portion of the British empire is represented, than by supposing the Lords of the Manor throughout England to be invested with the power of electing their representatives, — the manorial rights, too, being, in a much greater number of instances than at present, held independently of the land from which they derive their claim, and thus the na-

CHAP. XIV. 1791.

tural connection between property and the right of election being, in most cases, wholly separated. Such would be, as nearly as possible, a parallel to the system of representation now existing in Scotland; — a system, which it is the understood duty of all present and future Lord Advocates to defend, and which neither the lively assaults of a Sheridan, nor the sounder reasoning and industry of an Abercrombie have yet been able to shake.

The following extract from another of the many letters of Dr. Parr to Sheridan shows still further the feeling entertained towards Burke, even by some of those who most violently differed with him: —

"During the recess of Parliament I hope you will read the mighty work of my friend and your friend, and Mr. Fox's friend, Mackintosh: there is some obscurity and there are many Scotticisms in it; yet I do pronounce it the work of a most masculine and comprehensive mind. The arrangement is far more methodical than Mr. Burke's, the sentiments are more patriotic, the reasoning is more profound, and even the imagery in some places is scarcely less splendid. I think Mackintosh a better philosopher, and a better citizen, and I know him to be a far better scholar and a far better man than Payne; in

whose book there are great irradiations of genius, but none of the glowing and generous warmth which virtue inspires; that warmth which is often kindled in the bosom of Mackintosh, and which pervades almost every page in Mr. Burke's book—though I confess, and with sorrow I confess, that the holy flame was quite extinguished in his odious altercation with you and Mr. Fox."

A letter from the Prince of Wales to Sheridan this year furnishes a new proof of the confidence reposed in him by His Royal Highness. A question of much delicacy and importance having arisen between that Illustrious Personage and the Duke of York, — of a nature, as it appears, too urgent to wait for a reference to Mr. Fox,—Sheridan had alone the honour of advising His Royal Highness, in the correspondence that took place between him and his Royal Brother on that occasion. Though the letter affords no immediate clue to the subject of these communications, there is little doubt that they referred to a very important and embarrassing question, which is known to have been put by the Duke of York to the Heir Apparent, previously to his own marriage this year;—a question, which involved considerations connected

CHAP. XIV. 1791.

with the Succession to the Crown, and which the Prince, with the recollection of what occurred on the same subject in 1787, could only get rid of by an evasive answer.

CHAP. XV.

DEATH OF MRS. SHERIDAN.

In the year 1792, after a long illness, which terminated in consumption, Mrs. Sheridan died at Bristol, in the thirty-eighth year of her age.

There has seldom, perhaps, existed a finer combination of all those qualities that attract both eye and heart than this accomplished and lovely person exhibited. To judge by what we hear, it was impossible to see her without admiration, or know her without love; and a late Bishop used to say that "she seemed to him the connecting link between woman and angel."*

The devotedness of affection, too, with which she was regarded, not only by her own father, and sisters, but by all her husband's family, shewed that her fascination was of that best kind which, like charity, "begins at home;" and that, while her beauty and music enchanted the world, she had charms more intrinsic and lasting

* Jackson of Exeter, too, giving a description of her, in some Memoirs of his own Life that were never published, said that to see her, as she stood singing beside him at the piano-forte, was "like looking into the face of an angel."

CHAP. XV. 1792.

for those who came nearer to her. We have already seen with what pliant sympathy she followed her husband through his various pursuits, — identifying herself with the politician as warmly and readily as with the author, and keeping Love still attendant on Genius through all his transformations. As the wife of the dramatist and manager, we find her calculating the receipts of the house, assisting in the adaptation of her husband's opera, and reading over the plays sent in by dramatic candidates. As the wife of the senator and orator we see her, with no less zeal, making extracts from state-papers, and copying out ponderous pamphlets, — entering with all her heart and soul into the details of elections, and even endeavouring to fathom the mysteries of the Funds. The affectionate and sensible care with which she watched over, not only her own children, but those which her beloved sister, Mrs. Tickell, confided to her, in dying, gives the finish to this picture of domestic usefulness. When it is recollected, too, that the person thus homelily employed was gifted with every charm that could adorn and delight society, it would be difficult, perhaps, to find any where a more perfect example of that happy mixture of utility and ornament, in which all that is prized by the husband and the lover combines, and which renders woman what the Sacred

Fire was to the Parsees,—not only an object of adoration on their altars, but a source of warmth and comfort to their hearths.

To say that, with all this, she was not happy, nor escaped the censure of the world, is but to assign to her that share of shadow, without which nothing bright ever existed on this earth. United not only by marriage, but by love, to a man who was the object of universal admiration, and whose vanity and passions too often led him to yield to the temptations by which he was surrounded, it was but natural that, in the consciousness of her own power to charm, she should be now and then piqued into an appearance of retaliation, and seem to listen with complacence to some of those numerous worshippers, who crowd around such beautiful and unguarded shrines. Not that she was at any time unwatched by Sheridan; — on the contrary, he followed her with a lover's eyes throughout; and it was believed of both, by those who knew them best, that, even when they seemed most attracted by other objects, they would willingly, had they consulted the real wishes of their hearts, have given up every one in the world for each other. So wantonly do those, who have happiness in their grasp, trifle with that rare and delicate treasure, till, like the careless hand playing with a rose,—

CHAP. XV.

1792.

" In swinging it rudely, too rudely, alas,
They snap it—it falls to the ground."

They had, immediately after their marriage, as we have seen, passed some time in a little cottage at East Burnham, and it was a period, of course, long remembered by them both for its happiness. I have been told by a friend of Sheridan, that he once overheard him exclaiming to himself, after looking for some moments at his wife, with a pang, no doubt, of melancholy self-reproach, — " Could any thing bring back those first feelings ?" then adding, with a sigh, " Yes, perhaps, the cottage at East Burnham might." In this, as well as in some other traits of the same kind, there is assuredly any thing but that common-place indifference, which too often clouds over the evening of married life. On the contrary, it seems rather the struggle of affection with its own remorse; and, like the humourist who mourned over the extinction of his intellect so eloquently as to prove that it was still in full vigour, shows love to be still warmly alive in the very act of lamenting its death.

I have already presented the reader with some letters of Mrs. Sheridan, in which the feminine character of her mind very interestingly displays itself. Their chief charm is unaffectedness, and

the total absence of that literary style, which in the present day infects even the most familiar correspondence. I shall here give a few more of her letters, written at different periods to the elder sister of Sheridan, — it being one of her many merits to have kept alive between her husband and his family, though so far separated, a constant and cordial intercourse, which, unluckily, after her death, from his own indolence and the new connections into which he entered, was suffered to die away, almost entirely. The first letter, from its allusion to the Westminster Scrutiny, must have been written in the year 1784, Mr. Fox having gained his great victory over Sir Cecil Wray on the 17th of May, and the Scrutiny having been granted on the same day.

" My dear Lissy, London, June 6.

" I am happy to find by your last that our apprehensions on Charles's account were useless. The many reports that were circulated here of his accident gave us a good deal of uneasiness; but it is no longer wonderful that he should be buried here, when Mr. Jackman has so barbarously murdered him with you. I fancy he would risk another broken head, rather than give up his title to it as an officer of the Crown. We go on here wrangling as usual, but I am afraid

CHAP. XV.

all to no purpose. Those who are in possession of power are determined to use it without the least pretence to justice or consistency. They have ordered a Scrutiny for Westminster, in defiance of all law or precedent, and without any other hope or expectation but that of harassing and tormenting Mr. Fox and his friends, and obliging them to waste their time and money, which perhaps they think might otherwise be employed to a better purpose in another cause. We have nothing for it but patience and perseverance, which I hope will at last be crowned with success, though I fear it will be a much longer trial than we at first expected. I hear from every body that your . . . . . are vastly disliked, — but are you not all kept in awe by such beauty? I know she flattered herself to subdue all your Volunteers by the fire of her eyes only: — how astonished she must be to find they have not yet laid down their arms! There is nothing would tempt me to trust my sweet person upon the water sooner than the thoughts of seeing you; but I fear my friendship will hardly ever be put to so hard a trial. Though Sheridan is not in office, I think he is more engaged by politics than ever.

" I suppose we shall not leave town till September. We have promised to pay many visits, but I fear we shall be obliged to give up many

of our schemes, for I take it for granted Parliament will meet again as soon as possible. We are to go to Chatsworth, and to another friend of mine in that neighbourhood, so that I doubt our being able to pay our annual visit to Crewe Hall. Mrs. Crewe has been very ill all this winter with your old complaint, the rheumatism: —she is gone to Brighthelmstone to wash it away in the sea. Do you ever see Mrs. Greville? I am glad to hear my two nephews are both in so thriving a way. Are you still a nurse? I should like to take a peep at your bantlings. Which is the handsomest? have you candour enough to think any thing equal to your own boy? if you have, you have more merit than I can claim. Pray remember me kindly to Bess, Mr. L., &c., and don't forget to kiss the little squaller for me when you have nothing better to do. God bless you.

" Ever yours.

" The inclosed came to Dick in one of Charles's franks: he said he should write to you himself with it, but I think it safest not to trust him."

In another letter, written in the same year, there are some touches both of sisterly and of conjugal feeling which seem to bespeak a heart happy in all its affections.

" My dear Lissy, Putney, August 16.

" You will no doubt be surprised to find me still dating from this place, but various reasons have detained me here from day to day, to the great dissatisfaction of my dear Mary, who has been expecting me hourly for the last fortnight. I propose going to Hampton Court to-night, if Dick returns in any decent time from town.

" I got your letter and a half the day before yesterday, and shall be very well pleased to have such blunders occur more frequently. You mistake, if you suppose I am a friend to your tarrers and featherers: —it is such wretches that always ruin a good cause. There is no reason on earth why you should not have a new Parliament as well as us: — it might not, perhaps, be quite as convenient to our immaculate Minister, but I sincerely hope he will not find your Volunteers so accommodating as the present India troops in our House of Commons. What! does the Secretary at War condescend to reside in any house but his own? — 'Tis very odd he should turn himself out of doors in his situation. I never could perceive any economy in dragging furniture from one place to another; but, of course, he has more experience in these matters than I have.

" Mr. Forbes dined here the other day, and I had a great deal of conversation with him on

various subjects relating to you all. He says, Charles's manner of talking of his wife, &c. is so ridiculous, that, whenever he comes into company, they always cry out,—'Now, S——n, we allow you half an hour to talk of the beauties of Mrs. S.,—half an hour to your child, and another half hour to your farm,—and then we expect you will behave like a reasonable person.'

"So Mrs. —— is not happy:—poor thing, I dare say, if the truth were known, he teazes her to death. Your *very good* husbands generally contrive to make you sensible of their merit somehow or other.

"From a letter Mr. Canning has just got from Dublin, I find you have been breaking the heads of some of our English heroes. I have no doubt in the world that they deserved it; and if half a score more that I know had shared the same fate, it might, perhaps, become less the fashion among our young men to be such contemptible coxcombs as they certainly are.

"My sister desired me to say all sorts of affectionate things to you, in return for your kind remembrance of her in your last. I assure you, you lost a great deal by not seeing her in her maternal character:—it is the prettiest sight in the world to see her with her children:—they are both charming creatures, but my little namesake

CHAP. XV.

is my delight:—'tis impossible to say how foolishly fond of her I am. Poor Mary! she is in a way to have more;—and what will become of them all is sometimes a consideration that gives me many a painful hour. But *they* are happy, with *their* little portion of the goods of this world:—then, what are riches good for? For my part, as you know, poor Dick and I have always been struggling against the stream, and shall probably continue to do so to the end of our lives,—yet we would not change sentiments or sensations with . . . . for all his estate. By the bye, I was told t'other day he was going to receive eight thousand pounds as a compromise for his uncle's estate, which has been so long in litigation:—is it true?—I dare say it is though, or he would not be so discontented as you say he is. God bless you.—Give my love to Bess, and return a kiss to my nephew for me. Remember me to Mr. L., and believe me

"Truly yours."

The following letter appears to have been written in 1785, some months after the death of her sister, Miss Maria Linley. Her playful allusions to the fame of her own beauty might have been answered in the language of Paris to Helen:—

" *Minor est tua gloria vero*
Famaque de forma pene maligna est."

" Thy beauty far outruns even rumour's tongue,
And envious fame leaves half thy charms unsung."

" MY DEAR LISSY, Delapre Abbey, Dec. 27.

" Notwithstanding your incredulity, I assure you I wrote to you from Hampton Court, very soon after Bess came to England. My letter was a dismal one; for my mind was at that time entirely occupied by the affecting circumstance of my poor sister's death. Perhaps you lost nothing by not receiving my letter, for it was not much calculated to amuse you.

" I am still a recluse, you see, but I am preparing to *launch* for the winter in a few days. Dick was detained in town by a bad fever:—you may suppose I was kept in ignorance of his situation, or I should not have remained so quietly here. He came last week, and the fatigue of the journey very nearly occasioned a relapse:—but by the help of a jewel of a doctor that lives in this neighbourhood we are both quite stout and well again (for *I* took it into my head to fall sick again, too, without rhyme or reason).

" We purpose going to town to-morrow or next day. Our own house has been painting and papering, and the weather has been so unfavour-

CHAP. XV.

able to the business, that it is probable it will not be fit for us to go into this month; we have therefore accepted a most pressing invitation of General Burgoyne to take up our abode with him, till our house is ready;—so your next must be directed to Bruton Street, under cover to Dick, unless Charles will frank it again. I don't believe what you say of Charles's not being glad to have seen me in Dublin. You are very flattering in the reasons you give, but I rather think his vanity would have been more gratified by showing every body how much prettier and younger his wife was than the Mrs. Sheridan in whose favour they have been prejudiced by your good-natured partiality. If I could have persuaded myself to trust the treacherous ocean, the pleasure of seeing you and your nursery would have compensated for all the fame I should have lost by a comparison. But my guardian sylph, vainer of my beauty, perhaps, than myself, would not suffer me to destroy the flattering illusion *you* have so often displayed to your Irish friends. No,—I shall stay till I am past all pretensions, and then you may excuse your want of taste by saying, 'Oh, if you had seen her when she was young!'

"I am very glad that Bess is satisfied with my attention to her. The unpleasant situation I was in prevented my seeing her as often as I could

wish. For *her* sake I assure you I shall be glad to have Dick and your father on good terms, without entering into any arguments on the subject;—but I fear, where *one* of the parties at least, has a *tincture* of what they call in Latin *damnatus obstinatus mulio*, the attempt will be difficult, and the success uncertain. God bless you; and believe me Truly yours.

"Mrs. Lefanu, Great Cuff-Street, Dublin."

The next letter I shall give refers to the illness with which old Mr. Sheridan was attacked in the beginning of the year 1788, and of which he died in the month of August following. It is unnecessary to direct the reader's attention to the passages in which she speaks of her lost sister, Mrs. Tickell, and her children; — they have too much of the heart's best feelings in them to be passed over slightly.

"My dear Lissy, London, April 5.

"Your last letter I hope was written when you were low spirited, and consequently inclined to forebode misfortune. I would not show it to Sheridan: he has lately been much harassed by business, and I could not bear to give him the pain I know your letter would have occasioned. Partial as your father has always been to Charles, I am confident *he* never has, nor ever will feel

CHAP. XV.

half the duty and affections that Dick has always exprest. I know how deeply he will be afflicted, if you confirm the melancholy account of his declining health; — but I trust your next will remove my apprehensions, and make it unnecessary for me to wound his affectionate heart by the intelligence. I flatter myself, likewise, that you have been without reason alarmed about poor Bess. Her life, to be sure, must be dreadful; — but I should hope the good nature and kindness of her disposition will support her, and enable her to continue the painful duty so necessary, probably, to the comfort of your poor father. If Charles has not or does not do every thing in his power to contribute to the happiness of the few years which nature can allow him, he will have more to answer to his conscience than I trust any of those dear to me will have. Mrs. Crewe told us, the other day, she had heard from Mrs. Greville, that every thing was settled much to your father's satisfaction. I *will* hope, therefore, as I have said before, you were in a gloomy fit when you wrote, and in the mean time I will congratulate you on the recovery of your own health and that of your children.

"I have been confined now near two months —I caught cold almost immediately on coming to town, which brought on all those dreadful complaints with which I was afflicted at Crewe

Hall. By constant attention and strict regimen I am once more got about again; but I never go out of my house after the sun is down, and on those terms only can I enjoy tolerable health. I never knew Dick better. My dear boy is now with me for his holydays, and a charming creature he is, I assure you, in every respect. My sweet little charge, too, promises to reward me for all my care and anxiety. The little ones come to me every day though they do not at present live with me. We think of taking a house in the country this summer as necessary for my health and convenient to S., who must be often in town. I shall then have *all* the children with me, as they now constitute a very great part of my happiness. The scenes of sorrow and sickness I have lately gone through have depressed my spirits, and made me incapable of finding pleasure in the amusements which used to occupy me, perhaps, too much. My greatest delight is in the reflection that I am acting according to the wishes of my ever dear and lamented sister, and that by fulfilling the sacred trust bequeathed me in her last moments, I ensure my own felicity in the grateful affection of the sweet creatures, — whom, though I love for their own sakes, I idolise when I consider them as the dearest part of her who was the first and nearest friend of my heart!—God bless you, my dear Liss: this is a

subject that always carries me away. I will therefore bid you adieu, — only entreating you as soon as you can to send me a more comfortable letter. My kind love to Bess, and Mr. L.

"Yours, ever affectionately."

I shall give but one more letter; which is, perhaps, only interesting as showing how little her heart went along with the gaieties, into which her husband's connexion with the world of fashion and politics led her.

"My dear Lissy, May 23.

"I have only time at present to write a few lines at the request of Mrs. Crewe, who is made very unhappy by an account of Mrs. Greville's illness, as she thinks it possible Mrs. G. has not confessed the whole of her situation. She earnestly wishes you would find out from Dr. Quin what the nature of her complaint is, with every other particular you can gather on the subject, and give me a line as soon as possible.

"I am very glad to find your father is better. As there has been a recess lately from the Trial, I thought it best to acquaint Sheridan with his illness. I hope now, however, there is but little reason to be alarmed about him. Mr. Tickell has just received an account from Holland, that poor Mrs. Berkeley (whom you know best as

Betty Tickell) was at the point of death in a consumption.

" I hope in a very short time now to get into the country. The Duke of Norfolk has lent us a house within twenty miles of London; and I am impatient to be once more out of this noisy, dissipated town, where I do nothing that I really like, and am forced to appear pleased with every thing odious to me. God bless you. I write in the hurry of dressing for a great ball given by the Duke of York to-night, which I had determined not to go to till late last night, when I was persuaded that it would be very improper to refuse a Royal invitation, if I was not absolutely confined by illness. Adieu. Believe me truly yours.

" You must pay for this letter, for Dick has got your last with the direction; and any thing in his hands is *irrecoverable!*"

The health of Mrs. Sheridan, as we see by some of her letters, had been for some time delicate; but it appears that her last fatal illness originated in a cold, which she had caught in the summer of the preceding year. Though she continued from that time to grow gradually worse, her friends were flattered with the hope that as soon as her confinement should take place she would be relieved from all that

CHAP. XV. 1792.

appeared most dangerous in her complaint. That event, however, produced but a temporary intermission of the malady, which returned after a few days with such increased violence, that it became necessary for her, as a last hope, to try the waters of Bristol.

The following affectionate letter of Tickell must have been written at this period:—

"My dear Sheridan,

"I was but too well prepared for the melancholy intelligence contained in your last letter, in answer to which, as Richardson will give you this, I leave it to his kindness to do me justice in every sincere and affectionate expression of my grief for your situation, and my entire readiness to obey and further your wishes by every possible exertion.

"If you have any possible opportunity, let me entreat you to remember me to the dearest, tenderest friend and sister of my heart. Sustain yourself, my dear Sheridan,

"And believe me yours,

"Most affectionately and faithfully,

"R. Tickell."

The circumstances of her death cannot better be told than in the language of a lady whose name it would be an honour to mention, who

giving up all other cares and duties, accompanied her dying friend to Bristol, and devoted herself, with a tenderness rarely equalled even among women, to the soothing and lightening of her last painful moments. From the letters written by this lady at the time, some extracts have lately been given by Miss Lefanu * in her interesting Memoirs of her grandmother, Mrs. Frances Sheridan. But their whole contents are so important to the characters of the persons concerned, and so delicately draw aside the veil from a scene of which sorrow and affection were the only witnesses, that I feel myself justified not only in repeating what has already been quoted, but in adding a few more valuable particulars, which, by the kindness of the writer and her correspondent, I am enabled to give from the same authentic source. The letters

* The talents of this young lady are another proof of the sort of *gavel-kind* of genius allotted to the whole race of Sheridan. I find her very earliest poetical work, "The Sylphid Queen," thus spoken of in a letter from the second Mrs. Sheridan to her mother, Mrs. Lefanu:—"I should have acknowledged your very welcome present immediately, had not Mr. Sheridan, on my telling him what it was, run off with it, and I have been in vain endeavouring to get it from him ever since. What little I did read of it, I admired particularly; but it will be much more gratifying to you and your daughter to hear that *he* read it with the greatest attention, and thought it showed a great deal of imagination."

CHAP. XV. 1792.

are addressed to Mrs. H. Lefanu, the second sister of Mr. Sheridan.

" Bristol, June 1, 1792.

* * * * * * *

" I am happy to have it in my power to give you any information on a subject so interesting to you, and to all that have the happiness of knowing dear Mrs. Sheridan; though, I am sorry to add, it cannot be such as will relieve your anxiety, or abate your fears. The truth is, our poor friend is in a most precarious state of health, and quite given over by the faculty. Her physician here, who is esteemed very skilful in consumptive cases, assured me from the first that it was a *lost case;* but as your brother seemed unwilling to know the truth, he was not so explicit with him, and only represented her as being in a very critical situation. Poor man! he cannot bear to think her in danger himself, or that any one else should; though he is as attentive and watchful as if he expected every moment to be her last. It is impossible for any man to behave with greater tenderness, or to feel more on such an occasion, than he does.

* * * * * * *

" At times the dear creature suffers a great deal from weakness, and want of rest. She is very patient under her sufferings, and perfectly

resigned. She is well aware of her danger and talks of dying with the greatest composure. I am sure it will give you and Mr. Lefanu pleasure to know that her mind is well prepared for any change that may happen, and that she derives every comfort from religion that a sincere Christian can look for."

On the 28th of the same month Mrs. Sheridan died; and a letter from this lady, dated July 19th, thus touchingly describes her last moments. As a companion-picture to the close of Sheridan's own life, it completes a lesson of the transitoriness of this world, which might sadden the hearts of the beautiful and gifted, even in their most brilliant and triumphant hours. Far happier, however, in her death than he was, she had not only his affectionate voice to soothe her to the last, but she had one devoted friend, out of the many whom she had charmed and fascinated, to watch consolingly over her last struggle, and satisfy her as to the fate of the beloved objects which she left behind.

"July 19, 1792.

"Our dear departed friend kept her bed only two days, and seemed to suffer less during that interval than for some time before. She was perfectly in her senses to the last moment, and

CHAP. XV. 1792.

talked with the greatest composure of her approaching dissolution; assuring us all that she had the most perfect confidence in the mercies of an all-powerful and merciful Being, from whom alone she could have derived the inward comfort and support she felt at that awful moment! She said, she had no fear of death, and that all her concern arose from the thoughts of leaving so many dear and tender ties, and of what they would suffer from her loss. Her own family were at Bath, and had spent one day with her, when she was tolerably well. Your poor brother now thought it proper to send for them, and to flatter them no longer. They immediately came:—it was the morning before she died. They were introduced one at a time at her bed-side, and were prepared as much as possible for this sad scene. The women bore it very well, but all our feelings were awakened for her poor father. The interview between him and the dear angel was afflicting and heart-breaking to the greatest degree imaginable. I was afraid she would have sunk under the cruel agitation:—she said it was indeed too much for her. She gave some kind injunction to each of them, and said every thing she could to comfort them under this severe trial. They then parted, in the hope of seeing her again in the evening, but they never saw her more! Mr. Sheridan and I sat up all that night with her;—indeed he had done so for several nights before,

and never left her one moment that could be avoided. About four o'clock in the morning we perceived an alarming change, and sent for her physician.* She said to him, 'If you can relieve

* This physician was Dr. Bain, then a very young man, whose friendship with Sheridan began by this mournful duty to his wife, and only ended with the performance of the same melancholy office for himself. As the writer of the above letters was not present during the interview which she describes between him and Mrs. Sheridan, there are a few slight errors in her account of what passed, the particulars of which, as related by Dr. Bain himself, are as follows:—On his arrival, she begged of Sheridan and her female friend to leave the room, and then, desiring him to lock the door after them, said, "You have never deceived me:—tell me truly, shall I live over this night." Dr. Bain immediately felt her pulse, and, finding that she was dying, answered, "I recommend you to take some laudanum;" upon which she replied, "I understand you:—then give it me."

Dr. Bain fully concurs with the writer of these letters in bearing testimony to the tenderness and affection that Sheridan evinced on this occasion:—it was, he says, quite "the devotedness of a lover." The following note, addressed to him after the sad event was over, does honour alike to the writer and the receiver:—

"My dear Sir,

"I must request your acceptance of the inclosed for your professional attendance. For the kind and friendly attentions, which have accompanied your efforts, I must remain your debtor. The recollection of them will live in my mind with the memory of the dear lost object, whose sufferings you soothed, and whose heart was grateful for it.

"Believe me,

"Dear Sir,

"Very sincerely yours,

"Friday night. R. B. Sheridan."

CHAP. XV. 1792.

me, do it quickly;—If not, do not let me struggle, but give me some laudanum.' His answer was, 'Then I will give you some laudanum.' She desired to see Tom and Betty Tickell before she took it, of whom she took a most affecting leave! Your brother behaved most wonderfully, though his heart was breaking; and at times his feelings were so violent, that I feared he would have been quite ungovernable at the last. Yet he summoned up courage to kneel by the bedside, till he felt the last pulse of expiring excellence, and then withdrew. She died at five o'clock in the morning, 28th of June.

"I hope, my dear Mrs. Lefanu, you will excuse my dwelling on this most agonising scene. I have a melancholy pleasure in so doing, and fancy it will not be disagreeable to you to hear all the particulars of an event so interesting, so afflicting, to all who knew the beloved creature! For my part, I never beheld such a scene—never suffered such a conflict—much as I have suffered on my own account. While I live, the remembrance of it and the dear lost object can never be effaced from my mind.*

* The following striking reflection, which I have found upon a scrap of paper, in Sheridan's hand-writing, was suggested, no doubt, by his feelings on this occasion:—

"The loss of the breath from a beloved object, long suffering in pain and certainty to die, is not so great a privation

"We remained ten days after the event took place at Bristol; and on the 7th instant Mr. Sheridan and Tom, accompanied by all her family (except Mrs. Linley), Mr. and Mrs. Leigh, Betty Tickell and myself, attended the dear remains to Wells, where we saw her laid beside her beloved sister in the Cathedral. The choir attended; and there was such a concourse of people of all sorts assembled on the occasion that we could hardly move along. Mr. Leigh read the service in a most affecting manner. Indeed the whole scene, as you may easily imagine, was awful and affecting to a very great degree. Though the crowd certainly interrupted the solemnity very much, and, perhaps, happily for us abated somewhat of our feelings, which, had we been less observed, would not have been so easily kept down.

"The day after the sad scene was closed we separated, your brother choosing to be left by himself with Tom for a day or two. He afterwards joined us at Bath, where we spent a few days with our friends, the Leighs. Last Saturday we took leave of them, and on Sunday we arrived at Isleworth, where, with much regret, I left your brother to his own melancholy re-

as the last loss of her beautiful remains, if they remain so. The Victory of the Grave is sharper than the Sting of Death."

CHAP. XV. 1792.

flections, with no other companions but his two children, in whom he seems at present entirely wrapped up. He suffered a great deal in returning the same road, and was most dreadfully agitated on his arrival at Isleworth. His grief is deep and sincere, and I am sure will be lasting. He is in very good spirits, and at times is even cheerful, but the moment he is left alone he feels all the anguish of sorrow and regret. The dear little girl is the greatest comfort to him:—he cannot bear to be a moment without her. She thrives amazingly, and is indeed a charming little creature. Tom behaves with constant and tender attention to his father:—he laments his dear mother sincerely, and at the time was violently affected;—but at his age, the impressions of grief are not lasting; and his mind is naturally too lively and cheerful to dwell long on melancholy objects. He is in all respects truly amiable, and in many respects so like his dear, charming mother, that I am sure he will be ever dear to my heart. I expect to have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Sheridan again next week, when I hope to find him more composed than when I took leave of him last Sunday."

To the mention which is made, in this affecting letter, of the father of Mrs. Sheridan, whose destiny it had been to follow to the grave, within

a few short years, so many of his accomplished children *, I must add a few sentences more from another letter of the same lady, which, while they increase our interest in this amiable and ingenious man, bear testimony to Sheridan's attaching powers, and prove how affectionate he must have been to her who was gone,

* In 1778 his eldest son Thomas was drowned, while amusing himself in a pleasure-boat at the seat of the Duke of Ancaster. The pretty lines of Mrs. Sheridan to his violin are well known. A few years after, Samuel, a lieutenant in the navy, was carried off by a fever. Miss Maria Linley died in 1785, and Mrs. Tickell in 1787.

In the Memoirs of Mrs. Crouch I find the following anecdote:—"Poor Mr. Linley! after the death of one of his sons, when seated at the harpsichord in Drury Lane theatre, in order to accompany the vocal parts of an interesting little piece taken from Prior's Henry and Emma by Mr. Tickell, and excellently represented by Palmer and Miss Farren,—when the tutor of Henry, Mr. Aikin, gave an impressive description of a promising young man, in speaking of his pupil Henry, the feelings of Mr. Linley could not be suppressed. His tears fell fast—nor did he weep alone."

In the same work Mrs. Crouch is made to say that, after Miss Maria Linley died, it was melancholy for her to sing to Mr. Linley, whose tears continually fell on the keys as he accompanied her; and if, in the course of her profession, she was obliged to practise a song, which he had been accustomed to hear his lost daughter sing, the similarity of their manners and their voices, which he had once remarked with pleasure, then affected him to such a degree, that he was frequently forced to quit the instrument, and walk about the room to recover his composure.

CHAP. XV. 1792.

to be thus loved by the father to whom she was so dear:—

"Poor Mr. Linley has been here among us these two months. He is very much broke, but is still a very interesting and agreeable companion. I do not know any one more to be pitied than he is. It is evident that the recollection of past misfortunes preys on his mind, and he has no comfort in the surviving part of his family, they being all scattered abroad. Mr. Sheridan seems more his child than any one of his own, and I believe he likes being near him and his grandchildren."

Towards the autumn (as we learn from another letter of this lady) Mr. Sheridan endeavoured to form a domestic establishment for himself at Wanstead.

"Wanstead, October 22, 1792.

"Your brother has taken a house in this village very near me, where he means to place his dear little girl to be as much as possible under my protection. This was the dying request of my beloved friend; and the last effort of her mind and pen * was made the day before she ex-

* There are some touching allusions to these last thoughts of Mrs. Sheridan, in an Elegy, written by her brother, Mr.

pired, to draw up a solemn promise for both of us to sign, to ensure the strict performance of this last awful injunction: so anxious was she to commit this dear treasure to my care, well knowing how impossible it would be for a father, situated as your brother is, to pay that constant attention to her which a daughter so particularly requires. * * * You may be assured, I shall engage in the task with the greatest delight and alacrity: — would to God that I were in the smallest degree qualified to supply the place of that angelic, all-accomplished mother, of whose tender care she has been so early de-

---

William Linley, soon after the news of the sad event reached him in India: —

"Oh most beloved! my sister and my friend!
While kindred woes still breathe around thine urn,
Long with the tear of absence must *I* blend
The sigh, that speaks thou never shalt return.

* * * * * *

"'Twas Faith, that, bending o'er the bed of death,
Shot o'er thy pallid cheek a transient ray,
With softer effort soothed thy labouring breath,
Gave grace to anguish, beauty to decay.

"Thy friends, thy children, claim'd thy latest care;
Theirs was the last that to thy bosom clung;
For them to heaven thou sent'st the expiring prayer,
The last that falter'd on thy trembling tongue."

CHAP. XV. 1792.

prived. All I *can* do for her I *will* do; and if I can succeed so far as to give her early and steady principles of religion, and to form her mind to virtue, I shall think my time well employed, and shall feel myself happy in having fulfilled the first wish of her beloved mother's heart. * * * * * * *

To return to your brother, he talks of having his house here immediately furnished and made ready for the reception of his nursery. It is a very good sort of common house, with an excellent garden, roomy and fit for the purpose, but will admit of no show or expense. I understand he has taken a house in Jermyn Street, where he may see company, but he does not intend having any other country-house but this. Isleworth he gives up, his time being expired there. I believe he has got a private tutor for Tom — somebody very much to his mind. At one time he talked of sending him abroad with this gentleman, but I know not at present what his determinations are. He is too fond of Tom's society to let him go from him for any time; but I think it would be more to his advantage if he would consent to part with him for two or three years. It is impossible for any man to be more devotedly attached to his children than he is, and I hope they will be a comfort and a blessing to him, when the world loses its charms. The last time

I saw him, which was for about five minutes, I thought he looked remarkably well, and seemed tolerably cheerful. But I have observed in general that this affliction has made a wonderful alteration in the expression of his countenance and in his manners.* The Leighs and my family spent a week with him at Isleworth the beginning of August, where we were indeed most affectionately and hospitably entertained. I could hardly believe him to be the same man. In fact, we never saw him do the honours of his house before; *that*, you know, he always left to the dear, elegant creature, who never failed to please and charm every one who came within the sphere of her notice. Nobody could have filled her place so well; — he seemed to have pleasure in making much of those whom she loved and who, he knew, sincerely loved her. We all thought he never appeared to such advantage. He was attentive to every body and every thing, though grave and thoughtful; and his feelings, poor fellow, often ready to break forth in spite of his efforts to suppress them. He spent his evenings mostly by himself. He desired me, when I wrote, to let you know that she had by

* I have heard a noble friend of Sheridan say that, happening about this time to sleep in the room next to him, he could plainly hear him sobbing throughout the greater part of the night.

CHAP. XV. 1792.

will made a little distribution of what she called 'her own property,' and had left you and your sister rings of remembrance, and her *fausse montre*, containing Mr. Sheridan's picture, to you *, — Mrs. Joseph Lefanu having got hers. She left rings also to Mr. and Mrs. Leigh, my sister, daughter, and myself, and positively forbids any others being given on any pretence, but these I have specified, — evidently precluding all her *fine friends* from this last mark of her esteem and approbation. She had, poor thing, with some justice, turned from them all in disgust, and, I observed, during her illness, never mentioned any of them with regard or kindness.

The consolation which Sheridan derived from his little daughter was not long spared to him. In a letter, without a date, from the same amiable writer, the following account of her death is given: —

"The circumstances attending this melancholy event were particularly distressing. A large party of young people were assembled at your brother's to spend a joyous evening in danc-

* This bequest is thus announced by Sheridan himself in a letter to his sister, dated June 3, 1794: — "I mean also to send by Miss Patrick a picture which has long been your property, by a bequest from one whose image is not often from my mind, and whose memory, I am sure, remains in yours."

ing. We were all in the height of our merriment, — he himself remarkably cheerful, and partaking of the amusement, when the alarm was given, that the dear little angel was dying! It is impossible to describe the confusion and horror of the scene: — he was quite frantic, and I knew not what to do. Happily there were present several kind, good-natured men, who had their recollection, and pointed out what should be done. We very soon had every possible assistance, and for a short time we had some hope that her precious life would have been spared to us — but that was soon at an end!

"The dear babe never throve to my satisfaction: — she was small and delicate beyond imagination, and gave very little expectation of long life; but she had visibly declined during the last month. * * * Mr. Sheridan made himself very miserable at first, from an apprehension that she had been neglected or mismanaged; but I trust he is perfectly convinced that this was not the case. He was severely afflicted at first. The dear babe's resemblance to her mother after her death was so much more striking, that it was impossible to see her without recalling every circumstance of that afflicting scene, and he was continually in the room indulging the sad remembrance. In this manner he indulged his feelings for four or five days; then, having in-

CHAP. XV. 1792.

dispensable business, he was obliged to go to London, from whence he returned, on Sunday, apparently in good spirits and as well as usual. But, however he may assume the appearance of ease or cheerfulness, his heart is not of a nature to be quickly reconciled to the loss of any thing he loves. He suffers deeply and secretly; and I dare say he will long and bitterly lament both mother and child."

The reader will I think, feel with me, after reading the foregoing letters, as well as those of Mrs. Sheridan, given in the course of this work, that the impression which they altogether leave on the mind is in the highest degree favourable to the characters both of husband and wife. There is, round the whole, an atmosphere of kindly, domestic feeling, which seems to answer for the soundness of the hearts that breathed in it. The sensibility, too, displayed by Sheridan at this period, was not that sort of passionate return to former feelings, which the prospect of losing what it once loved might awaken in even the most alienated heart; — on the contrary, there was a depth and mellowness in his sorrow, which could proceed from long habits of affection alone. The idea of seeking solace for the loss of the mother in the endearments of the children would occur only to one who had

been accustomed to find happiness in his home, and who therefore clung for comfort to what remained of the wreck.

Such, I have little doubt, were the natural feelings and dispositions of Sheridan; and if the vanity of talent too often turned him aside from their influence, it is but another proof of the danger of that "light which leads astray," and may console those who, safe under the shadow of mediocrity, are unvisited by such disturbing splendours.

The following letters on this occasion, from his eldest sister and her husband, are a further proof of the warm attachment which he inspired in those connected with him: —

"My dearest Brother,

"Charles has just informed me that the fatal, the dreaded event has taken place. On my kness I implore the Almighty to look down upon you in your affliction, to strengthen your noble, your feeling heart to bear it. Oh my beloved brother, these are sad, sad trials of fortitude. One consolation, at least, in mitigation of your sorrow, I am sure you possess, — the consciousness of having done all you could to preserve the dear angel you have lost, and to soften the last painful days of her mortal existence. Mrs. Canning wrote to me that she was in a resigned

CHAP. XV. 1792.

and happy frame of mind: she is assuredly among the blest; and I feel and I think she looks down with benignity at my feeble efforts to soothe that anguish I participate. Let me then conjure you, my dear brother, to suffer me to endeavour to be of use to you. Could I have done it, I should have been with you from the time of your arrival at Bristol. The impossibility of my going has made me miserable, and injured my health, already in a very bad state. It would give value to my life, could I be of that service I think I *might* be of, if I were near you; and as I cannot go to you, and as there is every reason for your quitting the scene and objects before you, perhaps you may let us have the happiness of having you here, and my dear Tom: I will write to him when my spirits are quieter. I entreat you, my dear brother, try what change of place can do for you: your character and talents are here held in the highest estimation; and you have here some who love you beyond the affection any in England can feel for you.

"Cuff Street, 4th July. A. LEFANU."

"Wednesday, 4th July, 1792.

"MY DEAR GOOD SIR,

"Permit me to join my entreaties to Lissy's to persuade you to come over to us. A journey

might be of service to you, and change of objects a real relief to your mind. We would try every thing to divert your thoughts from too intensely dwelling on certain recollections, which are yet too keen and too fresh to be entertained with safety,—at least to occupy you too entirely. Having been so long separated from your sister, you can hardly have an adequate idea of her love for you. I, who on many occasions have observed its operation, can truly and solemnly assure you that it far exceeds any thing I could ever have supposed to have been felt by a sister towards a brother. I am convinced you would experience such soothing in her company and conversation as would restore you to yourself sooner than any thing that could be imagined. Come then, my dear sir, and be satisfied you will add greatly to her comfort, and to that of your very affectionate friend,

"J. LEFANU."

CHAP. XVI.

DRURY LANE THEATRE.—SOCIETY OF "THE FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE."—MADAME DE GENLIS.—WAR WITH FRANCE.—WHIG SECEDERS.—SPEECHES IN PARLIAMENT.—DEATH OF TICKELL.

CHAP. XVI. 1792.

THE domestic anxieties of Mr. Sheridan, during this year, left but little room in his mind for public cares. Accordingly, we find that, after the month of April, he absented himself from the House of Commons altogether. In addition to his apprehensions for the safety of Mrs. Sheridan, he had been for some time harassed by the derangement of his theatrical property, which was now fast falling into a state of arrear and involvement, from which it never after entirely recovered.

The Theatre of Drury Lane having been, in the preceding year, reported by the surveyors to be unsafe and incapable of repair, it was determined to erect an entirely new house upon the same site; for the accomplishment of which purpose a proposal was made, by Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Linley, to raise the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds, by the means

of three hundred debentures, of five hundred pounds each. This part of the scheme succeeded instantly; and I have now before me a list of the holders of the 300 shares, appended to the proposal of 1791, at the head of which the names of the three Trustees, in whom the Theatre was afterwards vested in the year 1793, stand for the following number of shares: — Albany Wallis, 20; Hammersley, 50; Richard Ford, 20. But, though the money was raised without any difficulty, the completion of the new building was delayed by various negotiations and obstacles, while, in the mean time, the company were playing, at an enormous expense, first in the Opera-House, and afterwards at the Haymarket Theatre, and Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Linley were paying interest for the first instalment of the loan.

To these and other causes of the increasing embarrassments of Sheridan is to be added the extravagance of his own style of living, which became much more careless and profuse after death had deprived him of her, whose maternal thoughtfulness alone would have been a check upon such improvident waste. We are enabled to form some idea of his expensive habits, by finding, from the letters which have just been quoted, that he was, at the same time, maintaining three establishments, — one at Wanstead,

CHAP. XVI. 1792.

where his son resided with his tutor; another at Isleworth, which he still held (as I learn from letters directed to him there) in 1793; and the third, his town-house, in Jermyn Street. Rich and ready as were the resources which the Treasury of the theatre opened to him, and fertile as was his own invention in devising new schemes of finance, such mismanaged expenditure would exhaust even *his* magic wealth, and the lamp must cease to answer to the rubbing at last.

The tutor, whom he was lucky enough to obtain for his son at this time, was Mr. William Smythe, a gentleman who has since distinguished himself by his classical attainments and graceful talent for poetry. Young Sheridan had previously been under the care of Dr. Parr, with whom he resided a considerable time at Hatton; and the friendship of this learned man for the father could not have been more strongly shown than in the disinterestedness with which he devoted himself to the education of the son. The following letter from him to Mr. Sheridan, in the May of this year, proves the kind feeling by which he was actuated towards him:—

"Dear Sir,

"I hope Tom got home safe, and found you in better spirits. He said something about drawing on your banker; but I do not under-

stand the process, and shall not take any step. You will consult your own convenience about these things; for my connection with you is that of friendship and personal regard. I feel and remember slights from those I respect, but acts of kindness I cannot forget; and, though my life has been passed far more in doing than receiving services, yet I know and I value the good dispositions of yourself and a few other friends, —men who are worthy of that name from me.

"If you choose Tom to return, he knows and you know how glad I am always to see him. If not, pray let him do something, and I will tell you what he should do.

"Believe me, dear Sir,

"Yours sincerely,

"S. PARR."

In the spring of this year was established the Society of "The Friends of the People," for the express purpose of obtaining a Parliamentary Reform. To this Association, which, less for its professed object than for the republican tendencies of some of its members, was particularly obnoxious to the loyalists of the day, Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Grey, and many others of the leading persons of the Whig party, belonged. Their Address to the People of England, which was put forth in the month of April, contained an

CHAP. XVI. 1792.

able and temperate exposition of the grounds upon which they sought for Reform; and the names of Sheridan, Mackintosh, Whitbread, &c., appear on the list of the Committee by which this paper was drawn up.

It is a proof of the little zeal which Mr. Fox felt at this period on the subject of Reform, that he withheld the sanction of his name from a Society to which so many of his most intimate political friends belonged. Some notice was taken in the House of this symptom of backwardness in the cause; and Sheridan, in replying to the insinuation, said that "they wanted not the signature of his Right Honourable Friend to assure them of his concurrence. They had his bond in the steadiness of his political principles and the integrity of his heart." Mr. Fox himself, however, gave a more definite explanation of the circumstance. "He might be asked," he said, "why his name was not on the list of the Society for Reform? His reason was, that though he saw great and enormous grievances, he did not see the remedy." It is to be doubted, indeed, whether Mr. Fox ever fully admitted the principle upon which the demand for a Reform is founded. When he afterwards espoused the question so warmly, it seems to have been merely as one of those weapons caught up in the heat of a warfare, in which Li-

berty itself appeared to him too imminently endangered, to admit of the consideration of any abstract principle, except that summary one of the right of resistance to power abused. From what has been already said, too, of the language held by Sheridan on this subject, it may be concluded that, though far more ready than his friend to inscribe Reform upon the banner of the party, he had even still less made up his mind as to the practicability or expediency of the measure. Looking upon it as a question, the agitation of which was useful to Liberty, and at the same time counting upon the improbability of its objects being accomplished, he adopted at once, as we have seen, the most speculative of all the plans that had been proposed, and flattered himself that he thus secured the benefit of the general principle, without risking the inconvenience of any of the practical details.

The following extract of a letter from Sheridan to one of his female correspondents, at this time, will show that he did not quite approve the policy of Mr. Fox in holding aloof from the Reformers:—

"I am down here with Mrs. Canning and her family, while all my friends and party are meeting in town, where I have excused myself, to lay their wise heads together in this crisis.

CHAP. XVI. 1792.

Again I say there is nothing but what is unpleasant before my mind. I wish to occupy and fill my thoughts with public matters, and, to do justice to the times, they afford materials enough; but nothing is in prospect to make activity pleasant, or to point one's efforts against one common enemy, making all that engage in the attack cordial, social and united. On the contrary, every day produces some new schism and absurdity. Windham has signed a nonsensical association with Lord Mulgrave; and when I left town yesterday, I was informed that the *Divan*, as the meeting at Debrett's is called, were furious at an *authentic* advertisement from the Duke of Portland against Charles Fox's speech in the Whig Club, which no one before believed to be genuine, but which they now say Dr. Lawrence brought from Burlington-House. If this is so, depend on it there will be a direct breach in what has been called the Whig Party. Charles Fox must come to the Reformers openly and avowedly; and in a month four-fifths of the Whig Club will do the same."

The motion for the Abolition of the Slave-trade, brought forward this year by Mr. Wilberforce (on whose brows it may be said, with much more truth than of the Roman General, "*Annexuit Africa lauros,*") was signalised by one of

the most splendid orations that the lofty eloquence of Mr. Pitt ever poured forth.* I mention the Debate, however, for the mere purpose of remarking, as a singularity, that, often as this great question was discussed in Parliament, and ample as was the scope which it afforded for the grander appeals of oratory, Mr. Sheridan was upon no occasion tempted to utter even a syllable on the subject,—except once for a few minutes, in the year 1787, upon some point relating to the attendance of a witness. The two or three sentences, however, which, he did speak on that occasion were sufficient to prove (what, as he was not a West-India proprietor, no one can doubt,) that the sentiments entertained by him on this interesting topic were, to the full extent, those which actuated not only his own party, but every real lover of justice and humanity throughout the world. To use a quotation which he himself applied to another branch of the question in 1807 :—

* It was at the conclusion of this speech that, in contemplating the period when Africa would, he hoped, participate in those blessings of civilization and knowledge which were now enjoyed by more fortunate regions, he applied the happy quotation, rendered still more striking, it is said, by the circumstance of the rising sun just then shining in through the windows of the House :—

" *Nos ..... primus equis Oriens afflavit anhelis,*
Illic sera rubens accendit lumina Vesper."

CHAP. XVI.

1792.

" I would not have a slave to till my ground,
To fan me when I sleep, and tremble when
I wake, for all that human sinews, bought
And sold, have ever earn'd."

The National Convention having lately, in the first paroxysm of their republican vanity, conferred the honour of Citizenship upon several distinguished Englishmen, and, among others, upon Mr. Wilberforce and Sir James Mackintosh, it was intended, as appears by the following letter from Mr. Stone, (a gentleman subsequently brought into notice by the trial of his brother for High Treason,) to invest Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan with the same distinction, had not the prudent interference of Mr. Stone saved them from this very questionable honour.

The following is the letter which this gentleman addressed to Sheridan on the occasion.

" Paris, Nov. 18. Year 1. of the French Republic.

" Dear Sir,

" I have taken a liberty with your name, of which I ought to give you notice, and offer some apology. The Convention, having lately enlarged their connections in Europe, are ambitious of adding to the number of their friends by bestowing some mark of distinction on those who have stood forth in support of their cause, when

its fate hung doubtful. The French conceive that they owe this obligation very eminently to you and Mr. Fox; and, to show their gratitude, the Committee appointed to make the Report has determined to offer to you and Mr. Fox the honour of Citizenship. Had this honour never been conferred before, had it been conferred only on worthy members of society, or were you and Mr. Fox only to be named at this moment, I should not have interfered. But as they have given the title to obscure and vulgar men and scoundrels, of which they are now very much ashamed themselves, I have presumed to suppose that you would think yourself much more honoured in the breach than the observance, and have there r e caused your nomination to be suspended. But I was influenced in this also by other considerations, of which one was, that, though the Committee would be more careful in their selection than the last had been, yet it was probable you would not like to share the honours with such as would be chosen. But another more important one that weighed with me was, that this new character would not be a small embarrassment in the route which you have to take the next session of Parliament, when the affairs of France must necessarily be often the subject of discussion. No one will suspect Mr.

CHAP. XVI.

Wilberforce of being seduced, and no one has thought that he did any thing to render him liable to seduction; as his superstition and devotedness to Mr. Pitt have kept him perfectly *à l'abri* from all temptations to err on the side of liberty, civil or religious. But to you and Mr. Fox the reproach will constantly be made, and the blockheads and knaves in the House will always have the means of influencing the opinions of those without, by opposing with success your English character to your French one; and that which is only a mark of gratitude for past services will be construed by malignity into a bribe of some sort for services yet to be rendered. You may be certain that, in offering the reasons for my conduct, I blush that I think it necessary to stoop to such prejudices. Of this, however, you will be the best judge, and I should esteem it a favour if you would inform me whether I have done right, or whether I shall suffer your names to stand as they did before my interference. There will be sufficient time for me to receive your answer, as I have prevailed on the reporter, M. Brissot, to delay a few days. I have given him my reasons for wishing the suspension, to which he has assented. Mr. O'Brien also prompted me to this deed, and, if I have done wrong, he must take half the punishment. My

address is, 'Rose, Huissier,' under cover of the President of the National Convention.

"I have the honour to be
"Your most obedient
"And most humble servant,
"J. H. STONE."

It was in the month of October of this year, that the romantic adventure of Madame de Genlis (in the contrivance of which the practical humour of Sheridan may, I think, be detected,) occurred on the road between London and Dartford. This distinguished lady had, at the close of the year 1791, with a view of escaping the turbulent scenes then passing in France, come over with her illustrious pupil, Mademoiselle d'Orleans, and her adopted daughter, Pamela*, to England,

* Married at Tournay in the month of December, 1792, to Lord Edward Fitzgerald. Lord Edward was the only one, among the numerous suitors of Mrs. Sheridan, to whom she was supposed to have listened with any thing like a return of feeling; and that there should be mutual admiration between two such noble specimens of human nature, it is easy, without injury to either of them, to believe.

Some months before her death, when Sheridan had been describing to her and Lord Edward a beautiful French girl whom he had lately seen, and added that she put him strongly in mind of what his own wife had been in the first bloom of her youth and beauty, Mrs. Sheridan turned to Lord Edward, and said with a melancholy smile, "I should like you, when I am dead, to marry that girl." This was

CHAP. XVI. 1792.

where she received, both from Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan, all that attention which her high character for talent, as well as the embarrassing nature of her situation at that moment, claimed for her.

The following letter from her to Mr. Fox I find inclosed in one from the latter to Mr. Sheridan :—

"SIR,

"You have, by your infinite kindness, given me the right to show you the utmost confidence. The situation I am in makes me desire to have with me, during two days, a person perfectly well instructed in the Laws, and very sure and honest. I desire such a person that I could offer to him all the money he would have for this trouble. But there is not a moment to be lost on the occasion. If you could send me directly this person, you would render me the most important service. To calm the most cruel agitation of a sensible and grateful soul shall be your reward. —Oh could I see you but a minute!—I am uneasy, sick, unhappy; surrounded by the most dreadful snares of the fraud and wickedness; I

Pamela, whom Sheridan had just seen during his visit of a few hours to Madame de Genlis at Bury in Suffolk, and whom Lord Edward married in about a year after.

am intrusted with the most interesting and sacred charge!—All these are my claims to hope your advices, protection, and assistance. My friends are absent in that moment; there is only *two names* in which I could place my confidence and my hopes. Pardon this bad language. As Hypolite I may say,

" '*Songez que je vous parle une langue étrangère,*'

but the feelings it expresses cannot be strangers to your heart.

" Sans avoir l'avantage d'être connue de Monsieur Fox, je prens la liberté de le supplier de communiquer cette lettre à Mr. Shéridan, et si ce dernier n'est pas à Londres, j'ose espérer de Monsieur Fox la même bonté que j'attendois de Mr. Shéridan dans l'embarras où je me trouve. Je m'addresse aux deux personnes de l'Angleterre que j'admire le plus, et je serois doublement heureuse d'être tirée de cette perplexité et de leur en avoir l'obligation. Je serais peut-être à Londres incessament. Je désirerois vivement les y trouver; mais en attendant je souhaite avec ardeur avoir ici le plus promptement possible l'homme de loi, ou seulement en état de donner de bons conseils que je demande. Je renouvelle toutes mes excuses de tant d'importunités."

CHAP XVI.

1792.

It was on her departure for France in the present year that the celebrated adventure, to which I have alluded, occurred; and as it is not often that the post-boys between London and Dartford are promoted into agents of mystery or romance, I shall give the entire narrative of the event in the lady's own words,—premising (what Mr. Sheridan, no doubt, discovered) that her imagination had been for some time on the watch for such incidents, as she mentions, in another place, her terrors at the idea of "crossing the desert plains of Newmarket without an escort."

"We left London," says Madame de Genlis, "on our return to France the 20th of October, 1792, and a circumstance occurred to us so extraordinary, that I ought not, I feel, to pass it over in silence. I shall merely, however, relate the fact, without any attempt to explain it, or without adding to my recital any of those reflections which the impartial reader will easily supply. We set out at ten o'clock in the morning in two carriages, one with six horses, and the other, in which were our maids, with four. I had, two months before, sent off four of my servants to Paris, so that we had with us only one French servant, and a footman, whom we had hired to attend us as far as Dover. When we were about a quarter of a league from London, the French servant, who had never made the journey from Dover to London but once before, thought he perceived that we were not in the right road, and on his making the remark to me, I perceived it also. The postillions, on being questioned, said that they had only wished to avoid a small hill, and that

they would soon return into the high road again. After an interval of three quarters of an hour, seeing that we still continued our way through a country that was entirely new to me, I again interrogated both the footman and the postillions, and they repeated their assurance that we should soon regain the usual road.

" Notwithstanding this, however, we still pursued our course with extreme rapidity, in the same unknown route; and as I had remarked that the post-boys and footman always answered me in a strange sort of laconic manner, and appeared as if they were afraid to stop, my companions and I began to look at each other with a mixture of surprise and uneasiness. We renewed our enquiries, and at last they answered that it was indeed true they had lost their way, but that they had wished to conceal it from us till they had found the cross-road to Dartford (our first stage), and that now, having been for an hour and a half in that road, we had but two miles to go before we should reach Dartford. It appeared to us very strange that people should lose their way between London and Dover, but the assurance that we were only half a league from Dartford dispelled the sort of vague fear that had for a moment agitated us. At last, after nearly an hour had elapsed, seeing that we still were not arrived at the end of the stage, our uneasiness increased to a degree which amounted even to terror. It was with much difficulty that I made the post-boys stop opposite a small village which lay to our left; in spite of my shouts they still went on, till at last the French servant (for the other did not interfere) compelled them to stop. I then sent to the village to ask how far we were from Dartford, and my surprise may be guessed when I received for answer that we were now 22 miles (more than seven leagues) distant from that place. Concealing my suspicions, I

CHAP. XVI.

1792.

took a guide in the village, and declared that it was my wish to return to London, as I found I was now at a less distance from that city than from Dartford. The post-boys made much resistance to my desire, and even behaved with an extreme degree of insolence, but our French servant, backed by the guide, compelled them to obey.

"As we returned at a very slow pace, owing to the sulkiness of the post-boys and the fatigue of the horses, we did not reach London before night-fall, when I immediately drove to Mr. Sheridan's house. He was extremely surprised to see me returned, and on my relating to him our adventure, agreed with us that it could not have been the result of mere chance. He then sent for a Justice of the Peace to examine the post-boys, who were detained till his arrival under the pretence of calculating their account;—but, in the mean time, the hired footman disappeared and never returned. The post-boys being examined by the Justice according to the legal form, and in the presence of witnesses, gave their answers in a very confused way, but confessed that an unknown gentleman had come in the morning to their master's, and carrying them from thence to a public-house, had, by giving them something to drink, persuaded them to take the road by which we had gone. The examination was continued for a long time, but no further confession could be drawn from them. Mr. Sheridan told me, that there was sufficient proof on which to ground an action against these men, but that it would be a tedious process, and cost a great deal of money. The post-boys were therefore dismissed, and we did not pursue the enquiry any farther. As Mr. Sheridan saw the terror I was in at the very idea of again venturing on the road to Dover, he promised to accompany us thither himself, but added

that, having some indispensable business on his hands, he could not go for some days. He took us then to Isleworth, a country-house which he had near Richmond, on the banks of the Thames, and as he was not able to dispatch his business so quickly as he expected, we remained for a month in that hospitable retreat, which both gratitude and friendship rendered so agreeable to us."

It is impossible to read this narrative, with the recollection, at the same time, in our minds of the boyish propensity of Sheridan to what are called practical jokes, without strongly suspecting that he was himself the contriver of the whole adventure. The ready attendance of the Justice, — the "unknown gentleman" deposed to by the post-boys,—the disappearance of the laquais, and the advice given by Sheridan that the affair should be pursued no further, — all strongly savour of dramatic contrivance, and must have afforded a scene not a little trying to the gravity of him who took the trouble of getting it up. With respect to his motive, the agreeable month at his country-house sufficiently explains it; nor could his conscience have felt much scruples about an imposture, which, so far from being attended with any disagreeable consequences, furnished the lady with an incident of romance, of which she was but too happy to avail herself, and procured for him the presence

CHAP. XVI. 1792.

of such a distinguished party, to grace and enliven the festivities of Isleworth.*

At the end of the month (adds Madame de Genlis),

"Mr. Sheridan having finished his business, we set off together for Dover, himself, his son, and an English friend of his, Mr. Reid, with whom I was but a few days acquainted. It was now near the end of the month of November, 1792. The wind being adverse, detained us for five days at Dover, during all which time Mr. Sheridan remained with us. At last the wind grew less unfavourable, but still blew so violently that nobody would advise me to embark. I resolved, however, to venture, and Mr. Sheridan attended us into the very packet-boat, where I received his farewell with a feeling of sadness which I cannot express. He would have crossed with us, but that some indispensable duty, at that moment, required his presence in England. He, however, left us Mr. Reid, who had the goodness to accompany us to Paris."

* In the Memoirs of Madame Genlis, lately published, she supplies a still more interesting key to his motives for such a contrivance. It appears, from the new recollections of this lady, that "he was passionately in love with Pamela," and that, before her departure from England, the following scene took place:—"Two days before we set out, Mr. Sheridan made, in my presence, his declaration of love to Pamela, who was affected by his agreeable manner and high character, and accepted the offer of his hand with pleasure. In consequence of this, it was settled that he was to marry her on our return from France, which was expected to take place in a fortnight." I suspect this to be but a continuation of the Romance of Dartford.

In 1793 war was declared between England and France. Though hostilities might, for a short time longer, have been avoided, by a more accommodating readiness in listening to the overtures of France, and a less stately tone on the part of the English negotiator, there could hardly have existed in dispassionate minds any hope of averting the war entirely, or even of postponing it for any considerable period. Indeed, however rational at first might have been the expectation, that France, if left to pass through the ferment of her own Revolution, would have either settled at last into a less dangerous form of power, or exhausted herself into a state of harmlessness during the process, this hope had been for some time frustrated by the crusade proclaimed against her liberties by the confederated Princes of Europe. The conference at Pilnitz and the Manifesto of the Duke of Brunswick had taught the French people what they were to expect, if conquered, and had given to that inundation of energy, under which the Republic herself was sinking, a vent and direction outwards that transferred all the ruin to her enemies. In the wild career of aggression and lawlessness of conquest without, and anarchy within, which naturally followed such an outbreak of a whole maddened people, it would have been difficult for England by any management whatever, to keep herself

uninvolved in the general combustion,—even had her own population been much less heartily disposed than they were then, and ever have been, to strike in with the great discords of the world.

That Mr. Pitt himself was slow and reluctant to yield to the necessity of hostile measures against France, appears from the whole course of his financial policy, down to the very close of the session of 1792. The confidence, indeed, with which he looked forward to a long continuance of peace, in the midst of events that were audibly the first mutterings of the earthquake, seemed but little indicative of that philosophic sagacity, which enables a statesman to see the rudiments of the Future in the Present.* "It is not unreasonable," said he, on the 21st of February, 1792, "to expect that the peace which we now enjoy should continue at least fifteen

* From the following words in his speech on the communication from France in 1800, he appears, himself, to have been aware of his want of foresight at the commencement of the war:—

"Besides this, the reduction of our Peace Establishment in the year 1791, and continued to the subsequent year, is a fact, from which the inference is indisputable; a fact, which, I am afraid, shows not only that we were not waiting for the occasion of war, but that, in our partiality for a pacific system, we had indulged ourselves in a fond and credulous security, which wisdom and discretion would not have dictated."

years, since at no period of the British history, whether we consider the internal situation of this kingdom or its relation to foreign powers, has the prospect of war been farther removed than at present."

In pursuance of this feeling of security, he, in the course of the session of 1791-2, repealed taxes to the amount of 200,000*l.* a year, made considerable reductions in the naval and military establishments, and allowed the Hessian Subsidy to expire, without any movement towards its renewal. He likewise showed his perfect confidence in the tranquillity of the country, by breaking off a negotiation into which he had entered with the holders of the four per cents., for the reduction of their stock to three per cent., — saying, in answer to their demand of a larger bonus than he thought proper to give, "Then we will put off the reduction of this stock till next year." The truth is, Mr. Pitt was proud of his financial system; — the abolition of taxes and the Reduction of the National Debt, were the two great results to which he looked as a proof of its perfection; and while a war, he knew, would produce the very reverse of the one, it would leave little more than the name and semblance of the other.

The alarm for the safety of their establishments, which at this time pervaded the great

CHAP. XVI. 1793.

mass of the people of England, carried the proof of its own needlessness in the wide extent to which it spread, and the very small minority that was thereby left to be the object of apprehension. That in this minority (which was, with few exceptions, confined to the lower classes,) the elements of sedition and insurrection were actively at work, cannot be denied. There was not a corner of Europe where the same ingredients were not brought into ferment; for the French Revolution had not only the violence, but the pervading influence of the Simoom, and while it destroyed where it immediately passed, made itself felt every where. But, surrounded and watched as were the few disaffected in England, by all the rank, property and power of the country, — animated at that moment by a more than usual portion of loyalty, — the dangers from sedition, as yet, were by no means either so deep or extensive, as that a strict and vigilant exercise of the laws already in being would not have been abundantly adequate to all the purposes of their suppression.

The admiration, indeed, with which the first dawn of the Revolution was hailed had considerably abated. The excesses into which the new Republic broke loose had alienated the worship of most of its higher class of votaries, and in some, as in Mr. Windham, had converted en-

thusiastic admiration into horror; — so that, though a strong sympathy with the general cause of the Revolution was still felt among the few Whigs that remained, the profession of its wild, republican theories was chiefly confined to two classes of persons, who coincide more frequently than they themselves imagine, — the speculative and the ignorant.

The Minister, however, gave way to a panic which, there is every reason to believe, he did not himself participate, and in going out of the precincts of the Constitution for new and arbitrary powers, established a series of fatal precedents, of which alarmed Authority will be always but too ready to avail itself. By these stretches of power he produced — what was far more dangerous than all the raving of club politicians — the vehement reaction of feeling on the part of Mr. Fox and his followers, which increased with the increasing rigour of the government, and sometimes led them to the brink of such modes and principles of opposition, as aggressions, so wanton, upon liberty alone could have either provoked or justified.

The great promoters of the alarm were Mr. Burke, and those other Whig Seceders who had for some time taken part with the administration against their former friends, and, as is usual with such proselytes, outran those whom they

joined, on every point upon which they before most differed from them. To justify their defection, the dangers upon which they grounded it, were exaggerated; and the eagerness with which they called for restrictions upon the liberty of the subject was but too worthy of deserters not only from their post but from their principles. One striking difference between these new pupils of Toryism and their master was with respect to the ultimate object of the war, Mr. Pitt being of opinion that security against the power of France, without any interference whatever with her internal affairs, was the sole aim to which hostilities should be directed; while nothing less than the restoration of the Bourbons to the power which they possessed before the assembling of the Etats Généraux could satisfy Mr. Burke and his fellow converts to the cause of Thrones and Hierarchies. The effect of this diversity of objects upon the conduct of the war—particularly after Mr. Pitt had added to "Security for the future," the suspicious supplement of "Indemnity for the past"—was no less fatal to the success of operations abroad than to the unity of councils at home. So separate, indeed, were the views of the two parties considered, that the unfortunate expedition, in aid of the Vendean insurgents in 1795, was known to be peculiarly the measure of the

Burke part of the cabinet, and to have been undertaken on the sole responsibility of their ministerial organ, Mr. Windham.

It must be owned, too, that the object of the Alarmists in the war, however grossly inconsistent with their former principles, had the merit of being far more definite than that of Mr. Pitt; and, had it been singly and consistently pursued from the first, with all the vigour and concentration of means so strenuously recommended by Mr. Burke, might have justified its quixotism in the end by a more speedy and less ruinous success. As it was, however, the divisions, jealousies, and alarms which Mr. Pitt's views towards a future dismemberment of France excited not only among the Continental powers, but among the French themselves, completely defeated every hope and plan for either concert without or co-operation within. At the same time, the distraction of the efforts of England from the heart of French power to its remote extremities, in what Mr. Windham called "a war upon sugar-islands," was a waste of means as unstatesman-like as it was calamitous, and fully entitled Mr. Pitt to the satire on his policy, conveyed in the remark of a certain distinguished lady, who said to him, upon hearing of some new acquisition in the West Indies, "I protest, Mr. Pitt, if you go on thus, you will soon be

CHAP. XVI. 1793.

master of every island in the world, except just those two little ones, England and Ireland."*

That such was the light in which Sheridan himself viewed the mode of carrying on the war recommended by the Alarmists, in comparison with that which Mr. Pitt in general adopted, appears from the following passage in his speech upon Spanish affairs in the year 1808:—

"There was hardly a person except his Right Honourable Friend near him (Mr. Windham) and Mr. Burke who since the Revolution of France had formed adequate notions of the necessary steps to be taken. The various governments which this country had seen during that period were always employed in filching for a sugar-island, or some other object of comparatively trifling moment, while the main and principal purpose was lost and forgotten."

Whatever were the failures of Mr. Pitt abroad, at home his ascendancy was fixed and indisputable; and, among all the triumphs of power which he enjoyed during his career, the tribute now paid to him by the Whig Aristocracy, in taking shelter under his ministry from the dangers of Revolution, could not have been the least gratifying to his haughty spirit. The India Bill had ranged on his side the King and

* Mr. Sheridan quoted this anecdote in one of his speeches in 1794.

the People, and the Revolution now brought to his banner the flower of the Nobility of both parties. His own estimate of rank may be fairly collected both from the indifference which he showed to its honours himself, and from the depreciating profusion with which he lavished them upon others. It may be doubted whether his respect for Aristocracy was much increased by the readiness which he now saw in some of his high-born opponents, to volunteer for safety into his already powerful ranks, without even pausing to try the experiment, whether safety might not have been reconcileable with principle in their own. It is certain that, without the accession of so much weight and influence he never could have ventured upon the violations of the Constitution that followed; — nor would the Opposition, accordingly, have been driven by these excesses of power into that reactive violence which was the natural consequence of an effort to resist them. The prudent apprehensions, therefore, of these noble Whigs would have been much more usefully as well as honourably employed, in mingling with, and moderating the proceedings of the friends of Liberty, than in ministering fresh fuel to the zeal and vindictiveness of her enemies.*

* The case against these Noble Seceders is thus spiritedly stated by Lord Moira:

"I cannot ever sit in a cabinet with the Duke of Port-

It may be added, too, that in allowing themselves to be persuaded by Burke, that the extinction of the antient *Noblesse* of France portended necessarily any danger to the English Aristocracy, these Noble persons did injustice to the strength of their own order, and to the characteristics by which it is proudly distinguished from every other race of Nobility in Europe. Placed, as a sort of break-water, between the People and the Throne, in a state of double responsibility to liberty on one side, and authority on the other, the Aristocracy of England hold a station which is dignified by its own great duties, and of which the titles transmitted by their ancestors form the least important ornament. Unlike the Nobility of other countries, where the rank and privileges of the father are

---

land. He appears to me to have done more injury to the Constitution and to the estimation of the higher ranks in this country than any man on the political stage. By his union with Mr. Pitt he has given it to be understood by the people, that either all the constitutional charges which he and his friends for so many years urged against Mr. Pitt were groundless, or that, being solid, there was no difficulty in waving them, when a convenient partition of powers and emoluments was proposed. In either case the people must infer that the constitutional principle which can be so played with is unimportant, and that parliamentary professions are no security." *Letter from the Earl of Moira to Colonel M'Mahon, in* 1797, *Parliamentary History.*

multiplied through his offspring, and equally elevate them all above the level of the community, the very highest English Nobleman must consent to be the father but of commoners. Thus, connected with the class below him by private as well as public sympathies, he gives his children to the People as hostages for the sincerity of his zeal in their cause — while on the other hand, the People, in return for these pledges of the Aristocracy, sends a portion of its own elements aloft into that higher region, to mingle with its glories, and assert their claim to a share in its power. By this mutual transfusion an equilibrium is preserved, like that which similar processes maintain in the natural world, and while a healthy, popular feeling circulates through the Aristocracy, a sense of their own station in the scale elevates the People.

To tremble for the safety of a Nobility so constituted, without much stronger grounds for alarm than appear to have existed in 1793, was an injustice not only to that class itself, but the whole nation. The world has never yet afforded an example, where this artificial distinction between mankind has been turned to such beneficial account; and as no monarchy can exist without such an order, so, in any other shape than this, such an order is a burden and a nuisance. In England, so happy a conformation of

CHAP. XVI. 1793.

her Aristocracy is one of those fortuitous results which time and circumstances have brought out in the long tried experiment of her Constitution; and, while there is no chance of its being ever again attained in the Old World, there is but little probability of its being attempted in the New,—where the youthful nations now springing into life, will, if they are wise, make the most of the free career before them, and unencumbered with the costly trappings of feudalism, adopt, like their northern neighbours, that form of government, whose simplicity and cheapness are the best guarantees for its efficacy and purity.

In judging of the policy of Mr. Pitt, during the Revolutionary war, his partizans, we know, laud it as having been the means of salvation to England, while his opponents assert that it was only prevented by chance from being her ruin—and though the event gives an appearance of triumph to the former opinion, it by no means removes or even weakens the grounds of the latter. During the first nine years of his administration, Mr. Pitt was, in every respect, an able and most useful minister, and, "while the sea was calm, showed mastership in floating." But the great events that happened afterwards took him by surprise. When he came to look abroad from his cabinet into the storm that was brewing

through Europe, the clear and enlarged view of the higher order of statesman was wanting. Instead of elevating himself above the influence of the agitation and alarm that prevailed, he gave way to it with the crowd of ordinary minds, and even took counsel from the panic of others. The consequence was a series of measures, violent at home and inefficient abroad — far short of the mark where vigour was wanting, and beyond it, as often, where vigour was mischievous.

When we are told to regard his policy as the salvation of the country — when (to use a figure of Mr. Dundas) a *claim of salvage* is made for him, — it may be allowed us to consider a little the nature of the measures, by which this alleged salvation was achieved. If entering into a great war without either consistency of plan, or preparation of means, and with a total ignorance of the financial resources of the enemy * — if allowing one part of the Cabinet to flatter the French Royalists, with the hope of seeing the Bourbons restored to undiminished power, while the other part acted, whenever an opportunity offered, upon the plan of dismembering France for the aggrandizement of Austria, and thus, at once alienated Prussia at the very moment of sub-

* Into his erroneous calculations upon this point he is supposed to have been led by Sir Francis D'Ivernois.

sidizing him, and lost the confidence of all the Royalist party in France*, except the few who were ruined by English assistance at Quiberon — if going to war in 1793 for the right of the Dutch to a river, and so managing it that in 1794 the Dutch lost their whole Seven Provinces — if lavishing more money upon failures than the successes of a century had cost, and supporting this profusion by schemes of finance, either hollow and delusive, like the Sinking Fund, or desperately regardless of the future, like the paper issues — if driving Ireland into rebellion by the perfidious recall of Lord Fitzwilliam, and reducing England to two of the most fearful trials, that a nation, depending upon Credit and a navy, could encounter, the stoppage of her Bank and a mutiny in her fleet — if, finally, floundering on from effort to effort against France, and then dying upon the ruins of the last Coalition he could muster against her — if all this betokens a wise and able minister, then is Mr. Pitt most amply entitled to that name ; — then are the lessons of wisdom to be

* Among other instances the Abbé Maury is reported to have said at Rome in a large company of his countrymen — "Still we have one remedy — let us now allow France to be divided — we have seen the partition of Poland : we must all turn Jacobins to preserve our country."

read, like Hebrew, backward, and waste and rashness and systematic failure to be held the only true means of saving a country.

Had even success, by one of those anomalous accidents, which sometimes baffle the best founded calculations of wisdom, been the immediate result of this long monotony of error, it could not, except with those to whom the event is every thing — "*Eventus stultorum magister*" * — reflect back merit upon the means by which it was achieved, or, by a retrospective miracle, convert that into wisdom, which chance had only saved from the worst consequences of folly. Just as well might we be called upon to pronounce Alchemy a wise art, because a perseverance in its failures and reveries had led by accident to the discoveries of Chemistry. But even this sanction of good luck was wanting to the unredeemed mistakes of Mr. Pitt. During the eight years that intervened between his death and the termination of the contest, the adoption of a far wiser policy was forced upon his more tractable pupils; and the only share that his measures can claim in the successful issue of the war, is that of having produced the grievance that was then abated — of having raised up the power opposed to him to the por-

* A saying of the wise Fabius.

CHAP. XVI.

tentous and dizzy height, from which it then fell by the giddiness of its own elevation*, and by the reaction, not of the Princes, but the People of Europe against its yoke.

What would have been the course of affairs, both foreign and domestic, had Mr. Fox — as was, at one time, not improbable — been the Minister during this period, must be left to that super-human knowledge, which the schoolmen call "*media scientia,*" and which consists in knowing all that would have happened, had events been otherwise than they have been. It is probable that some of the results would not have been so different as the respective principles of Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox might naturally lead us, on the first thought, to assert. If left to himself, there is little doubt that the latter, from the simple and fearless magnanimity of his nature, would have consulted for the public safety, with that moderation which true courage inspires; and that, even had it been necessary to suspend the Constitution for a season, he would have known how to veil the statue of Liberty †, without leaving, like his rival, such marks of mutilation on

* —— "*summisque negatum*
Stare diu." LUCAN.

† "*Il y a des cas où il faut mettre pour un moment un voile sur la Liberté, comme l'on cache les statues des dieux.*" MONTESQUIEU, liv. xii. chap. 20.

its limbs. But it is to be recollected that he would have had to encounter, in his own ranks, the very same patrician alarm, which could even to Mr. Pitt give an increase of momentum against liberty, and which the possession of power would have rendered but more sensitive and arbitrary. Accustomed, too, as he had long been, to yield to the influence of Burke, it would have required more firmness than habitually belonged to Mr. Fox, to withstand the persevering impetuosity of such a counsellor, or keep the balance of his mind unshaken by those stupendous powers, which, like the horses of the Sun breaking out of the ecliptic, carried every thing they seized upon, so splendidly astray: —

> " *quaque impetus egit,*
> *Hac sine lege ruunt, altoque sub æthere fixis*
> *Incursant stellis, rapiuntque per avia currum.*"
>
> Where'er the impulse drives, they burst away,
> In lawless grandeur:—break into the array
> Of the fix'd stars, and bound a blaze along
> Their devious course, magnificently wrong!

Having hazarded these general observations, upon the views and conduct of the respective parties of England, during the Crusade now begun against the French people, I shall content myself with briefly and cursorily noticing the chief questions upon which Mr. Sheridan dis-

CHAP. XVI.

1793.

tinguished himself, in the course of the parliamentary campaigns that followed. The sort of *guerilla* warfare, which he and the rest of the small band attached to Mr. Fox carried on, during this period, against the invaders of the Constitution, is interesting rather by its general character than its detail; for in these, as usual, the episodes of party personality are found to encroach disproportionately on the main design, and the grandeur of the cause, as viewed at a distance, becomes diminished to our imaginations by too near an approach. Englishmen, however, will long look back to that crisis with interest; and the names of Fox, of Sheridan, and of Grey, will be affectionately remembered, when that sort of false elevation, which party-feeling now gives to the reputations of some who were opposed to them, shall have subsided to its due level, or been succeeded by oblivion. They who act against the general sympathies of mankind, however they may be artificially buoyed up for the moment, have the current against them in the long run of fame; while the reputation of those whose talents have been employed upon the popular and generous side of human feelings, receives, through all time, an accelerating impulse from the countless hearts that go with it in its course. Lord Chatham, even now, supersedes his son in fame, and will leave him at an immeasurable distance with posterity.

Of the events of the private life of Mr. Sheridan, during this stormy part of his political career, there remain but few memorials among his papers. As an illustration, however, of his love of betting — the only sort of gambling in which he ever indulged — the following curious list of his wagers for the year is not unamusing: —

"25th *May*, 1793. — Mr. Sheridan bets Gen. Fitzpatrick one hundred guineas to fifty guineas, that within two years from this date some measure is adopted in Parliament which shall be (*bonâ fide*) considered as the adoption of a Parliamentary Reform."

"29th *January*, 1793. — Mr. S. bets Mr. Boothby Clopton five hundred guineas, that there is a Reform in the Representation of the people of England within three years from the date hereof."

"29th *January*, 1793. — Mr. S. bets Mr. Hardy one hundred guineas to fifty guineas, that Mr. W. Windham does not represent Norwich at the next general election."

"29th *January*, 1793. — Mr. S. bets Gen. Fitzpatrick fifty guineas, that a corps of British troops are sent to Holland within two months of the date hereof."

"18th *March*, 1793. — Mr. S. bets Lord Titchfield two hundred guineas, that the D. of Portland is at the head of an Administration on or before the 18th of

CHAP. XVI.

1793.

March, 1796: Mr. Fox to decide whether any place the Duke may then fill shall *bonâ fide* come within the meaning of this bet."

"25th *March*, 1793. — Mr. S. bets Mr. Hardy one hundred guineas, that the three per cent. consols are as high this day twelvemonth as at the date hereof."

"Mr. S. bets Gen. Tarleton one hundred guineas to fifty guineas, that Mr. Pitt is first Lord of the Treasury on the 28th of May, 1795. — Mr. S. bets Mr. St. A. St. John fifteen guineas to five guineas, ditto. — Mr. S. bets Lord Sefton one hundred and forty guineas to forty guineas, ditto."

"19th *March*, 1793. — Lord Titchfield and Lord W. Russell bet Mr. S. three hundred guineas to two hundred guineas, that Mr. Pitt is first Lord of the Treasury on the 19th of March, 1795."

"18th *March*, 1793. — Lord Titchfield bets Mr. S. twenty-five guineas to fifty guineas, that Mr. W. Windham represents Norwich at the next general election."

As a sort of moral supplement to this strange list, and one of those insights into character and conduct which it is the duty of a biographer to give, I shall subjoin a letter, connected evidently with one of the above speculations: —

"Sir,

"I am very sorry that I have been so circumstanced as to have been obliged to disappoint

you respecting the payment of the five hundred guineas: when I gave the draughts on Lord * * I had every reason to be assured he would accept them, as * * had also. I enclose you, as you will see by his desire, the letter in which he excuses his not being able to pay me this part of a larger sum he owes me, and I cannot refuse him any time he requires, however inconvenient to me. I also enclose you two draughts accepted by a gentleman from whom the money will be due to me, and on whose punctuality I can rely. I extremely regret that I cannot at this juncture command the money.

" At the same time that I regret your being put to any inconvenience by this delay, I cannot help adverting to the circumstance which perhaps misled me into the expectation that you would not unwillingly allow me any reasonable time I might want for the payment of this bet. The circumstance I mean, however discreditable the plea, is the total inebriety of some of the party, particularly of myself, when I made this preposterous bet. I doubt not you will remember having yourself observed on this circumstance to a common friend the next day, with an intimation that you should not object to being off; and for my part, when I was informed that I had made such a bet and for such a sum, — the first, such folly on the face of it on my part, and the latter so out of my practice, — I cer-

CHAP. XVI. 1793.

tainly should have proposed the cancelling it, but that, from the intimation imparted to me, I hoped the proposition might come from you.

" I hope I need not for a moment beg you not to imagine that I am now alluding to these circumstances as the slightest invalidation of your due. So much the contrary, that I most perfectly admit that from your not having heard any thing further from me on the subject, and especially after I might have heard that if I desired it the bet might be off, you had every reason to conclude that I was satisfied with the wager, and whether made in wine or not, was desirous of abiding by it. And this was further confirmed by my receiving soon after from you 100*l.* on another bet won by me.

" Having, I think, put this point very fairly, I again repeat that my only motive for alluding to the matter was, as some explanation of my seeming dilatoriness, which certainly did in part arise from always conceiving that, whenever I should state what was my real wish the day after the bet was made, you would be the more disposed to allow a little time ; — the same statement admitting, as it must, the bet to be as clearly and as fairly won as possible; in short, as if I had insisted on it myself the next morning.

" I have said more, perhaps, on the subject than can be necessary; but I should regret to

appear negligent to an application for a just claim.

" I have the honour to be,
" Sir,
" Your obedient servant,

" Hertford St., Feb. 26. R. B. SHERIDAN."

Of the public transactions of Sheridan at this time, his speeches are the best record. To them, therefore, I shall henceforward principally refer my readers, — premising that though the reports of his latter speeches are somewhat better, in general, than those of his earlier displays, they still do great injustice to his powers, and exhibit little more than the mere *Torso* of his eloquence curtailed of all those accessories that lent motion and beauty to its form. The attempts to give the terseness of his wit particularly fail, and are a strong illustration of what he himself once said to Lord * *. That Nobleman, who among his many excellent qualities does not include a very lively sense of humour, having exclaimed, upon hearing some good anecdote from Sheridan, " I'll go and tell that to our friend * *," Sheridan called him back instantly and said, with much gravity, " For God's sake, don't, my dear * *: a joke in your mouth is no laughing matter."

It is indeed, singular, that all the eminent

English orators — with the exception of Mr. Burke and Mr. Windham — should have been so little anxious for the correct transmission of their eloquence to posterity. Had not Cicero taken more care of even his extemporaneous effusions, we should have lost that masterly burst of the moment, to which the clemency of Cæsar towards Marcellus gave birth. The beautiful fragments we have of Lord Chatham are rather traditional than recorded; — there are but two, I believe, of the speeches of Mr. Pitt corrected by himself, those on the Budget of 1792, and on the Union with Ireland; — Mr. Fox committed to writing but one of his, namely, the tribute to the memory of the Duke of Bedford; — and the only speech of Mr. Sheridan, that is known with certainty to have passed under his own revision, was that which he made at the opening of the following session (1794), in answer to Lord Mornington.

In the course of the present year he took frequent opportunities of expressing his disgust at that spirit of ferocity, which had so deeply disgraced the cause of the Revolution. So earnest was his interest in the fate of the Royal Family of France, that, as appears from one of his speeches, he drew up a paper on the subject, and transmitted it to the republican rulers; — with the view, no doubt, of conveying to them

the feelings of the English Opposition, and endeavouring to avert, by the influence of his own name and that of Mr. Fox, the catastrophe that awaited those Royal victims of liberty. Of this interesting document I cannot discover any traces.

In one of his answers to Burke on the subject of the French Revolution, adverting to the charge of Deism and Atheism brought against the republicans, he says,

"As an argument to the feelings and passions of men, the Honourable Member had great advantages in dwelling on this topic; because it was a subject which those who disliked every thing that had the air of cant and profession on the one hand, or of indifference on the other, found it awkward to meddle with. Establishments, tests, and matters of that nature, were proper objects of political discussion in that House, but not general charges of Atheism and Deism, as pressed upon their consideration by the Honourable Gentleman. Thus far, however, he would say, and it was an opinion he had never changed or concealed, that, although no man can command his conviction, he had ever considered a deliberate disposition to make proselytes in infidelity as an unaccountable depravity. Whoever attempted to pluck the belief or the prejudice on this subject, style it which he would, from the bosom of one man, woman, or child, committed a brutal outrage, the motive for which he had never been able to trace or conceive."

I quote these words as creditable to the feeling and good sense of Sheridan. Whatever may be

thought of particular faiths and sects, a belief in a life beyond this world is the only thing that pierces through the walls of our prison-house, and lets hope shine in upon a scene, that would be otherwise bewildered and desolate. The proselytism of the Atheist is, indeed, a dismal mission. That believers, who have each the same heaven in prospect, should invite us to join them on their respective ways to it, is at least a benevolent officiousness;—but that he, who has no prospect or hope himself, should seek for companionship in his road to annihilation, can only be explained by that tendency in human creatures to count upon each other in their despair, as well as their hope.

In the speech upon his own Motion relative to the existence of seditious practices in the country, there is some lively ridicule upon the panic then prevalent. For instance:—

"The alarm had been brought forward in great pomp and form on Saturday morning. At night all the mail-coaches were stopped; the Duke of Richmond stationed himself, among other curiosities, at the Tower; a great municipal officer, too, had made a discovery exceedingly beneficial to the people of this country. He meant the Lord Mayor of London, who had found out that there was at the King's Arms in Cornhill a Debating Society, where principles of the most dangerous tendency were propagated; where people went to buy treason at sixpence a head; where it was retailed to them by the glim-

mering of an inch of candle; and five minutes, to be measured by the glass, were allowed to each traitor to perform his part in overturning the State."

It was in the same speech that he gave the well-known and happy turn to the motto of the Sun newspaper, which was at that time known to be the organ of the Alarmists. "There was one paper," he remarked, "in particular, said to be the property of members of that House, and published and conducted under their immediate direction, which had for its motto a garbled part of a beautiful sentence, when it might, with much more propriety, have assumed the whole —

"'*Solem quis dicere falsum*
Audeat? Ille etiam cæcos instare tumultus
Sæpè monet, fraudemque et operta tumescere bella.'"

Among the subjects that occupied the greatest share of his attention, during this Session, was the Memorial of Lord Auckland to the States-General, — which document he himself brought under the notice of Parliament, as deserving of severe reprobation for the violent and vindictive tone which it assumed towards the Commissioners of the National Convention. It was upon one of the discussions connected with this subject that a dispute, as to the correct translation of the word "*malheureux*," was maintained with much earnestness between him and Lord

CHAP. XVI.

1793.

Melville — two persons, the least qualified, perhaps, of any in the House, to volunteer as either interpreters or pronouncers of the French language. According to Sheridan, "*ces malheureux*" was to be translated "these wretches," while Lord Melville contended, to the no small amusement of the House, that "*mollyroo*" (as he pronounced it) meant no more than "these unfortunate gentlemen."

In the November of this year Mr. Sheridan lost, by a kind of death which must have deepened the feeling of the loss, the most intimate of all his companions, Tickell. If congeniality of dispositions and pursuits were always a strengthener of affection, the friendship between Tickell and Sheridan ought to have been of the most cordial kind; for they resembled each other in almost every particular — in their wit, their wants, their talent, and their thoughtlessness. It is but too true, however, that friendship in general gains far less by such a community of pursuit than it loses by the competition that naturally springs out of it; and that two wits or two beauties form the last sort of alliance, in which we ought to look for specimens of sincere and cordial friendship. The intercourse between Tickell and Sheridan was not free from such collisions of vanity. They seem to have lived, indeed, in a state of alternate repulsion and at-

traction; and, unable to do without the excitement of each other's vivacity, seldom parted without trials of temper as well as of wit. Being both, too, observers of character, and each finding in the other rich materials for observation, their love of ridicule could not withstand such a temptation, and they freely criticized each other to common friends, who, as is usually the case, agreed with both. Still, however, there was a whim and sprightliness, even about their mischief, which made it seem rather an exercise of ingenuity than an indulgence of ill nature; and if they had not carried on this intellectual warfare, neither would have liked the other half so well.

The two principal productions of Tickell, the "Wreath of Fashion" and "Anticipation," were both upon temporary subjects, and have accordingly passed into oblivion. There are, however, some graceful touches of pleasantry in the poem; and the pamphlet (which procured for him not only fame but a place in the Stamp-office) contains passages, of which the application and the humour have not yet grown stale. As Sheridan is the hero of the Wreath of Fashion, it is but right to quote the verses that relate to him; and I do it with the more pleasure, because they also contain a well-merited tribute to Mrs. Sheridan. After a description of the va-

CHAP. XVI.

rious poets of the day that deposit their offerings in Lady Millar's "Vase of Sentiment," the author thus proceeds: —

"At Fashion's shrine behold a gentler bard
Gaze on the mystic vase with fond regard —
But see, Thalia checks the doubtful thought,
'Canst thou (she cries) with sense, with genius fraught,
Canst thou to Fashion's tyranny submit,
Secure in native, independent wit?
Or yield to sentiment's insipid rule,
By Taste, by Fancy, chac'd through Scandal's school?'
Ah no — be Sheridan's the comic page,
Or let me fly with Garrick from the stage.'
Haste then, my friend, (for let me boast that name,)
Haste to the opening path of genuine fame;
Or, if thy muse a gentler theme pursue,
Ah! 'tis to love and thy Eliza due!
For, sure, the sweetest lay she well may claim,
Whose soul breathes harmony o'er all her frame;
While wedded love with ray serenely clear,
Beams from her eye, as from its proper sphere."

In the year 1781, Tickell brought out at Drury Lane an opera called "The Carnival of Venice," on which there is the following remark in Mrs. Crouch's Memoirs: — "Many songs in this piece so perfectly resemble in poetic beauty those which adorn The Duenna, that they declare themselves to be the offspring of the same muse." I know not how far this conjecture may be founded, but there are four pretty

lines which I remember in this opera, and which it may be asserted without hesitation, Sheridan never wrote. He had no feeling for natural scenery*, nor is there a trace of such a sentiment discoverable through his poetry. The following, as well as I can recollect, are the lines:—

"And while the moon shines on the stream,
And as soft music breathes around,
The feathering oar returns the gleam,
And dips in concert to the sound."

I have already given a humorous Dedication of The Rivals, written by Tickell on the margin of a copy of that play in my possession. I shall now add another piece of still more happy humour, with which he has filled, in very neat handwriting, the three or four first pages of the same copy.

* In corroboration of this remark, I have been allowed to quote the following passage of a letter written by a very eminent person, whose name all lovers of the Picturesque associate with their best enjoyment of its beauties:—

"At one time I saw a good deal of Sheridan—he and his first wife passed some time here, and he is an instance that a taste for poetry and for scenery are not always united. Had this house been in the midst of Hounslow Heath, he could not have taken less interest in all around it: his delight was in shooting, all and every day, and my gamekeeper said that, of all the gentlemen he had ever been out with, he never knew so bad a shot."

CHAP. XVI.

"The Rivals, a Comedy—one of the best in the English language—written as long ago as the reign of George the Third. The author's name was Sheridan—he is mentioned by the historians of that age as a man of uncommon abilities, very little improved by cultivation. His confidence in the resources of his own genius and his aversion to any sort of labour were so great that he could not be prevailed upon to learn either to read or write. He was, for a short time, Manager of one of the play-houses, and conceived the extraordinary and almost incredible project of composing a play extempore, which he was to recite in the Green-room to the actors, who were immediately to come on the stage and perform it. The players refusing to undertake their parts at so short a notice, and with so little preparation, he threw up the management in disgust.

"He was a member of the last Parliaments that were summoned in England, and signalised himself on many occasions by his wit and eloquence, though he seldom came to the House till the debate was nearly concluded, and never spoke, unless he was drunk. He lived on a footing of great intimacy with the famous Fox, who is said to have concerted with him the audacious attempt which he made, about the year 1783, to seize the whole property of the East India Company, amounting at that time to above 12,000,000*l.* sterling, and then to declare himself Lord Protector of the realm by the title of Carlo Khan. This desperate scheme actually received the consent of the lower House of Parliament, the majority of whom were bribed by Fox, or intimidated by his and Sheridan's threats and violence; and it is generally believed that the Revolution would have taken place, if the Lords of the King's Bedchamber had not in a body surrounded the throne and shown the most determined re-

solution not to abandon their posts but with their lives. The usurpation being defeated, Parliament was dissolved and loaded with infamy. Sheridan was one of the few members of it who were re-elected: — the Burgesses of Stafford, whom he had kept in a constant state of intoxication for near three weeks, chose him again to represent them, which he was well qualified to do.

" Fox's Whig party being very much reduced, or rather almost annihilated, he and the rest of the conspirators remained quiet for some time; till, in the year 1788, the French, in conjunction with Tippoo Sultan, having suddenly seized and divided between themselves the whole of the British possessions in India, the East India Company broke, and a national bankruptcy was apprehended. During this confusion Fox and his partizans assembled in large bodies, and made a violent attack in Parliament on Pitt, the King's first minister: — Sheridan supported and seconded him. Parliament seemed disposed to enquire into the cause of the calamity: the nation was almost in a state of actual rebellion; and it is impossible for us, at the distance of three hundred years, to form any judgment what dreadful consequences might have followed, if the King, by the advice of the Lords of the Bedchamber, had not dissolved Parliament, and taken the administration of affairs into his own hands, and those of a few confidential servants, at the head of whom he was pleased to place one Mr. Atkinson, a merchant, who had acquired a handsome fortune in the Jamaica trade, and passed universally for a man of unblemished integrity. His Majesty having now no farther occasion for Pitt, and being desirous of rewarding him for his past services, and, at the same time, finding an adequate employment for his great talents, caused him to enter into holy orders, and

CHAP. XVI.

presented him with the Deanery of Windsor; where he became an excellent preacher, and published several volumes of sermons, all of which are now lost.

"To return to Sheridan: — on the abrogation of Parliaments, he entered into a closer connection than ever with Fox and a few others of lesser note, forming together as desperate and profligate a gang as ever disgraced a civilized country. They were guilty of every species of enormity, and went so far as even to commit robberies on the highway, with a degree of audacity that could be equalled only by the ingenuity with which they escaped conviction. Sheridan, not satisfied with eluding, determined to mock the justice of his country, and composed a Masque called 'The Foresters,' containing a circumstantial account of some of the robberies he had committed, and a good deal of sarcasm on the pusillanimity of those whom he had robbed, and the inefficacy of the penal laws of the kingdom. This piece was acted at Drury Lane Theatre with great applause, to the astonishment of all sober persons, and the scandal of the nation. His Majesty, who had long wished to curb the licentiousness of the press and the theatres, thought this a good opportunity. He ordered the performers to be enlisted into the army, the play-house to be shut up, and all theatrical exhibitions to be forbid on pain of death. Drury Lane play-house was soon after converted into a barrack for soldiers, which it has continued to be ever since. Sheridan was arrested, and it was imagined, would have suffered the rack, if he had not escaped from his guard by a stratagem, and gone over to Ireland in a balloon with which his friend Fox furnished him. Immediately on his arrival in Ireland, he put himself at the head of a party of the most violent Reformers, commanded a regiment of Volunteers at the siege of Dublin

in 1791, and was supposed to be the person who plumned the scheme for tarring and feathering Mr. Jenkinson, the Lord Lieutenant, and forcing him in that condition to sign the capitulation of the Castle. The persons who were to execute this strange enterprise had actually got into the Lord Lieutenant's apartment at midnight, and would probably have succeeded in their project, if Sheridan, who was intoxicated with whiskey, a strong liquor much in vogue with the Volunteers, had not attempted to force open the door of Mrs. ———'s bed-chamber, and so given the alarm to the garrison, who instantly flew to arms, seized Sheridan and every one of his party and confined them in the castle-dungeon. Sheridan was ordered for execution the next day, but had no sooner got his legs and arms at liberty, than he began capering, jumping, dancing, and making all sorts of antics, to the utter amazement of the spectators. When the chaplain endeavoured, by serious advice and admonition, to bring him to a proper sense of his dreadful situation, he grinned, made faces at him, tried to tickle him, and played a thousand other pranks with such astonishing drollery, that the gravest countenances became cheerful, and the saddest hearts glad. The soldiers who attended at the gallows were so delighted with his merriment, which they deemed magnanimity, that the sheriffs began to apprehend a rescue, and ordered the hangman instantly to do his duty. He went off in a loud horse-laugh, and cast a look towards the Castle, accompanied with a gesture expressive of no great respect.

"Thus ended the life of this singular and unhappy man — a melancholy instance of the calamities that attend the misapplication of great and splendid ability. He was married to a very beautiful and amiable woman, for whom he is said to have entertained an unalterable

CHAP. XVI.

affection. He had one son, a boy of the most promising hopes, whom he would never suffer to be instructed in the first rudiments of literature. He amused himself, however, with teaching the boy to draw portraits with his toes, in which he soon became so astonishing a proficient that he seldom failed to take a most exact likeness of every person who sat to him.

" There are a few more plays by the same author, all of them excellent.

" For further information concerning this strange man, vide ' Macpherson's Moral History,' Art. *Drunkenness.*"

CHAP. XVII.

SPEECH IN ANSWER TO LORD MORNINGTON. — COALITION OF THE WHIG SECEDERS WITH MR. PITT. — MR. CANNING. — EVIDENCE ON THE TRIAL OF HORNE TOOKE. — "THE GLORIOUS FIRST OF JUNE."— MARRIAGE OF MR. SHERIDAN. — PAMPHLET OF MR. REEVES. — DEBTS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES. — SHAKSPEARE MANUSCRIPTS.— TRIAL OF STONE. — MUTINY AT THE NORE. — SECESSION OF MR. FOX FROM PARLIAMENT.

In the year 1794, the natural consequences of the policy pursued by Mr. Pitt began rapidly to unfold themselves both at home and abroad.* The confederated Princes of the Continent, among whom the gold of England was now the sole bond of union, had succeeded as might be expected from so noble an incentive, and, powerful only in provoking France, had by every

* See, for a masterly exposure of the errors of the War, the Speech of Lord Lansdowne this year on bringing forward his Motion for Peace.

I cannot let the name of this Nobleman pass, without briefly expressing the deep gratitude which I feel to him, not only for his own kindness to me, when introduced, as a boy, to his notice, but for the friendship of his truly Noble descendant, which I, in a great degree, owe to him, and which has long been the pride and happiness of my life.

CHAP. XVII.

1794.

step they took but ministered to her aggrandizement. In the mean time, the measures of the English Minister at home were directed to the two great objects of his legislation — the raising of supplies and the suppressing of sedition; or, in other words, to the double and anomalous task of making the people pay for the failures of their Royal allies, and suffer for their sympathy with the success of their republican enemies. It is the opinion of a learned Jesuit that it was by *aqua regia* the Golden Calf of the Israelites was dissolved — and the cause of Kings was the Royal Solvent, in which the wealth of Great Britain now melted irrecoverably away. While the successes, too, of the French had already lowered the tone of the Minister from projects of aggression to precautions of defence, the wounds which, in the wantonness of alarm, he had inflicted on the liberties of the country, were spreading an inflammation around them that threatened real danger. The severity of the sentences upon Muir and Palmer in Scotland, and the daring confidence with which charges of High Treason were exhibited against persons who were, at the worst, but indiscreet reformers, excited the apprehensions of even the least sensitive friends of freedom. It is, indeed, difficult to say how far the excited temper of the Government, seconded by the ever ready

subservience of state lawyers and bishops, might have proceeded at this moment, had not the acquittal of Tooke and his associates, and the triumph it diffused through the country, given a lesson to power such as England is alone capable of giving, and which will long be remembered, to the honour of that great political safeguard, — that Life-preserver in stormy times, — the Trial by Jury.

At the opening of the Session, Mr. Sheridan delivered his admirable answer to Lord Mornington, the report of which, as I have already said, was corrected for publication by himself. In this fine speech, of which the greater part must have been unprepared, there is a natural earnestness of feeling and argument, that is well contrasted with the able but artificial harangue that preceded it. In referring to the details which Lord Mornington had entered into of the various atrocities committed in France, he says : —

"But what was the sum of all that he had told the House? that great and dreadful enormities had been committed, at which the heart shuddered, and which not merely wounded every feeling of humanity, but disgusted and sickened the soul. All this was most true; but what did all this prove? What, but that eternal and unalterable truth which had always presented itself to his mind, in whatever way he had viewed the subject;

CHAP. XVII.

1794.

namely, that a long established despotism so far degraded and debased human nature, as to render its subjects, on the first recovery of their rights, unfit for the exercise of them. But never had he, or would he meet but with reprobation that mode of argument which went, in fact, to establish, as an inference from this truth, that those who had been long slaves, ought, therefore, to remain so for ever! No; the lesson ought to be, he would again repeat, a tenfold horror of that despotic form of government, which had so profaned and changed the nature of civilised man, and a still more jealous apprehension of any system tending to withhold the rights and liberties of our fellow-creatures. Such a form of government might be considered as twice cursed; while it existed, it was solely responsible for the miseries and calamities of its subjects; and should a day of retribution come, and the tyranny be destroyed, it was equally to be charged with all the enormities which the folly or frenzy of those who overturned it should commit.

"But the madness of the French people was not confined to their proceedings within their own country; we, and all the Powers of Europe, had to dread it. True; but was not this also to be accounted for? Wild and unsettled as their state of mind was, necessarily, upon the events which had thrown such power so suddenly into their hands, the surrounding States had goaded them into a still more savage state of madness, fury, and desperation. We had unsettled their reason, and then reviled their insanity; we drove them to the extremities that produced the evils we arraigned; we baited them like wild beasts, until at length we made them so. The conspiracy of Pilnitz, and the brutal threats of the Royal abettors of that plot against the rights of nations and of men, had, in truth, to answer for all the additional

misery, horrors, and iniquity, which had since disgraced and incensed humanity. Such has been your conduct towards France, that you have created the passions which you persecute; you mark a nation to be cut off from the world; you covenant for their extermination; you swear to hunt them in their inmost recesses; you load them with every species of execration; and you now come forth with whining declamations on the horror of their turning upon you with the fury which you inspired."

Having alluded to an assertion of Condorcet, quoted by Lord Mornington, that "Revolutions are always the work of the minority," he adds livelily: —

"If this be true, it certainly is a most ominous thing for the enemies of Reform in England; for, if it holds true, of necessity, that the minority still prevails, in national contests, it must be a consequence that the smaller the minority the more certain must be the success. In what a dreadful situation then must the Noble Lord be and all the Alarmists! — for, never surely was a minority so small, so thin in number as the present. Conscious, however, that M. Condorcet was mistaken in our object, I am glad to find that we are terrible in proportion as we are few; I rejoice that the liberality of secession which has thinned our ranks has only served to make us more formidable. The Alarmists will hear this with new apprehensions; they will no doubt return to us with a view to diminish our force, and encumber us with their alliance in order to reduce us to insignificance."

We have here another instance, in addition to the many that have been given of the beauties that sprung up under Sheridan's correcting hand. This last pointed sentence was originally thus: "And we shall swell our numbers in order to come nearer in a balance of insignificance to the numerous host of the majority."

It was at this time evident that the great Whig Seceders would soon yield to the invitations of Mr. Pitt and the vehement persuasions of Burke, and commit themselves still further with the Administration by accepting of office. Though the final arrangements to this effect were not completed till the summer, on account of the lingering reluctance of the Duke of Portland and Mr. Windham, Lord Loughborough and others of the former Opposition had already put on the official livery of the Minister. It is to be regretted that, in almost all cases of conversion to the side of power, the coincidence of some worldly advantage with the change should make it difficult to decide upon the sincerity or disinterestedness of the convert. That these Noble Whigs were sincere in their alarm there is no reason to doubt; but the lesson of loyalty they have transmitted would have been far more edifying, had the usual corollary of honours and emoluments not followed, and had they left at least one instance of political conversion on

record, where the truth was its own sole reward, and the proselyte did not subside into the placeman. Mr. Sheridan was naturally indignant at these desertions, and his bitterness overflows in many passages of the speech before us. Lord Mornington having contrasted the privations and sacrifices demanded of the French by their Minister of Finance with those required of the English nation, he says, in answer; —

"The Noble Lord need not remind us, that there is no great danger of our Chancellor of the Exchequer making any such experiment. I can more easily fancy another sort of speech for our prudent Minister. I can more easily conceive him modestly comparing himself and his own measures with the character and conduct of his rival, and saying, — 'Do I demand of you, wealthy citizens, to lend your hoards to government without interest? On the contrary, when I shall come to propose a loan, there is not a man of you to whom I shall not hold out at least a job in every part of the subscription, and an usurious profit upon every pound you devote to the necessities of your country. Do I demand of you, my fellow-placemen and brother-pensioners, that you should sacrifice any part of your stipends to the public exigency? On the contrary, am I not daily increasing your emoluments and your numbers in proportion as the country becomes unable to provide for you? Do I require of you, my latest and most zealous proselytes, of you who have come over to me for the special purpose of supporting the war, — a war, on the succesn of which you solemnly protest, that the salvation of Britain, and of civil society itself, depend, — do I require of you, that

CHAP. XVII.

1794.

you should make a temporary sacrifice, in the cause of human nature, of the greater part of your private incomes? No, gentlemen, I scorn to take advantage of the eagerness of your zeal; and to prove that I think the sincerity of your attachment to me needs no such test, I will make your interest co-operate with your principle: I will quarter many of you on the public supply, instead of calling on you to contribute to it; and, while their whole thoughts are absorbed in patriotic apprehensions for their country, I will dexterously force upon others the favourite objects of the vanity or ambition of their lives.' * * * * * *

* * * * * * *

"Good God, sir, that he should have thought it prudent to have forced this contrast upon our attention; that he should triumphantly remind us of every thing that shame should have withheld, and caution would have buried in oblivion! Will those who stood forth with a parade of disinterested patriotism, and vaunted of the *sacrifices* they had made, and the *exposed situation* they had chosen, in order the better to oppose the friends of Brissot in England — will they thank the Noble Lord for reminding us how soon these lofty professions dwindled into little jobbing pursuits for followers and dependants, as unfit to fill the offices procured for them, as the offices themselves were unfit to be created? — Will the train of newly titled alarmists, of supernumerary negociators, of pensioned paymasters, agents and commissaries, thank him for remarking to us how profitable their panic has been to themselves, and how expensive to their country? What a contrast, indeed, do we exhibit! — What! in such an hour as this, at a moment pregnant with the national fate, when, pressing as the exigency may be, the hard task of squeezing the money

from the pockets of an impoverished people, from the toil, the drudgery of the shivering poor, must make the most practised collector's heart ache while he tears it from them — can it be, that people of high rank, and professing high principles, that *they* or *their families* should seek to thrive on the spoils of misery, and fatten on the meals wrested from industrious poverty? Can it be, that this should be the case with the very persons, who state the *unprecedented peril of the country* as the *sole* cause of their being found in the ministerial ranks? The Constitution is in danger, religion is in danger, the very existence of the nation itself is endangered; all personal and party considerations ought to vanish; the war must be supported by every possible exertion, and by every possible sacrifice; the people must not murmur at their burdens, it is for their salvation, their all is at stake. The time is come, when all honest and disinterested men should rally round the Throne as round a standard; — for what? ye honest and disinterested men, to receive, for your own private emolument, a portion of those very taxes wrung from the people, on the pretence of saving them from the poverty and distress which you say the enemy would inflict, but which you take care no enemy shall be able to aggravate. Oh! shame! shame! is this a time for selfish intrigues, and the little dirty traffic for lucre and emolument? Does it suit the honour of a gentleman to ask at such a moment? Does it become the honesty of a Minister to grant? Is it intended to confirm the pernicious doctrine, so industriously propagated by many, that all public men are impostors, and that every politician has his price? Or even where there is no principle in the bosom, why does not prudence hint to the mercenary and the vain to abstain a while at least, and wait the fitting of the times? Improvident impa-

CHAP. XVII.

1794.

tience! Nay, even from those who seem to have no direct object of office or profit, what is the language which their actions speak? The Throne is in danger! — 'we will support the Throne; but let us share the smiles of Royalty;' — the order of Nobility is in danger! — 'I will fight for Nobility,' says the Viscount, 'but my zeal would be much greater if I were made an Earl.' 'Rouse all the Marquis within me,' exclaims the Earl, 'and the peerage never turned forth a more undaunted champion in its cause than I shall prove.' 'Stain my green riband blue,' cries out the illustrious Knight, 'and the fountain of honour will have a fast and faithful servant.' What are the people to think of our sincerity? — What credit are they to give to our professions? — Is this system to be persevered in? Is there nothing that whispers to that Right Honourable Gentleman that the crisis is too big, that the times are too gigantic, to be ruled by the little hackneyed and every-day means of ordinary corruption?"

The discussions during the whole of this Session were marked by a degree of personal acrimony, which in the present more sensitive times would hardly be borne. Mr. Pitt and Mr. Sheridan came, most of all, into collision; and the retorts of the Minister not unfrequently proved with what weight the haughty sarcasms of Power may descend even upon the tempered buckler of Wit.

It was in this Session, and on the question of the Treaty with the King of Sardinia, that Mr. Canning made his first appearance as an orator in the House. He brought with him a fame,

already full of promise, and has been one of the brightest ornaments of the senate and the country ever since. From the political faith in which he had been educated, under the very eyes of Mr. Sheridan, who had long been the friend of his family, and at whose house he generally passed his college vacations, the line that he was to take in the House of Commons seemed already, according to the usual course of events, marked out for him. Mr. Sheridan had, indeed, with an eagerness which, however premature, showed the value which he and others set upon the alliance, taken occasion, in the course of a laudatory tribute to Mr. Jenkinson *, on the success of his first effort in the House, to announce the accession which his own party was about to receive, in the talents of another gentleman, — the companion and friend of the young orator who had now distinguished himself. Whether this and other friendships, formed by Mr. Canning at the University, had any share in alienating him from a political creed, which he had hitherto, perhaps, adopted rather from habit and authority than choice — or whether he was startled at the idea of appearing for the first time in the world, as the announced pupil and friend of a person who, both by the

* Now Lord Liverpool.

CHAP. XVII.

1794.

vehemence of his politics and the irregularities of his life, had put himself, in some degree, under the ban of public opinion — or whether, lastly, he saw the difficulties which even genius like his would experience, in rising to the full growth of its ambition, under the shadowing branches of the Whig aristocracy, and that superseding influence of birth and connections which had contributed to keep even such men as Burke and Sheridan out of the Cabinet — *which* of these motives it was that now decided the choice of the young political Hercules, between the two paths that equally wooed his footsteps, none, perhaps, but himself can fully determine. His decision, we know, was in favour of the Minister and Toryism; and, after a friendly and candid explanation to Sheridan of the reasons and feelings that urged him to this step, he entered into terms with Mr. Pitt, and was by him immediately brought into Parliament.

However dangerous it might be to exalt such an example into a precedent, it is questionable whether, in thus resolving to join the ascendant side, Mr. Canning has not conferred a greater benefit on the country than he ever would have been able to effect in the ranks of his original friends. That Party, which has now so long been the sole depositary of the power of the State, had, in addition to the original narrow-

ness of its principles, contracted all that proud obstinacy in antiquated error, which is the invariable characteristic of such monopolies; and which, however consonant with its vocation, as the chosen instrument of the Crown, should have long since *invalided* it in the service of a free and enlightened people. Some infusion of the spirit of the times into this body had become necessary, even for its own preservation — in the same manner as the inhalement of youthful breath has been recommended by some physicians to the infirm and superannuated. This renovating inspiration the genius of Mr. Canning has supplied. His first political lessons were derived from sources too sacred to his young admiration to be forgotten. He has carried the spirit of these lessons with him into the councils which he joined, and by the vigour of the graft, which already shows itself in the fruits, bids fair to change altogether the nature of Toryism.

Among the eminent persons summoned as witnesses on the Trial of Horne Tooke, which took place in the November of this year, was Mr. Sheridan; and, as his evidence contains some curious particulars, both with regard to himself and the state of political feeling in the year 1790, I shall here transcribe a part of it: —

CHAP. XVII.

1794.

" He (Mr. Sheridan) said he recollects a meeting to celebrate the establishment of liberty in France in the year 1790. Upon that occasion he moved a Resolution drawn up the day before by the Whig Club. Mr. Horne Tooke, he says, made no objection to his motion, but proposed an amendment. Mr. Tooke stated that an unqualified approbation of the French Revolution in the terms moved, might produce an ill effect out of doors, a disposition to a revolution in this country, or, at least, be misrepresented to have that object; he adverted to the circumstance of their having all of them national cockades in their hats; he proposed to add some qualifying expression to the approbation of the French Revolution, a declaration of attachment to the principles of our own Constitution; he said Mr. Tooke spoke in a figurative manner of the former Government of France; he described it as a vessel so foul and decayed, that no repair could save it from destruction; that in contrasting our state with that, he said, thank God, the main timbers of our Constitution are sound; he had before observed, however, that some reforms might be necessary; he said that sentiment was received with great disapprobation, and with very rude interruption, insomuch that Lord Stanhope, who was in the chair, interfered; he said it had happened to him, in many public meetings, to differ with and oppose the prisoner, and that he has frequently seen him received with very considerable marks of disapprobation, but he never saw them affect him much; he said that he himself objected to Mr. Tooke's amendment; he thinks he withdrew his amendment, and moved it as a separate motion; he said it was then carried as unanimously as his own motion had been; that original motion and separate motion are in these words: — ' That this meeting does most cordially

rejoice in the establishment and confirmation of liberty in France; and it beholds with peculiar satisfaction the sentiments of amity and good will which appear to pervade the people of that country towards this kingdom, especially at a time when it is the manifest interest of both states that nothing should interrupt the harmony which at present subsists between them, and which is so essentially necessary to the freedom and happiness, not only of the French nation, but of all mankind.' Mr. Tooke wished to add to his motion some qualifying clause, to guard against misunderstanding and misrepresentation: — that there was a wide difference between England and France; that in France the vessel was so foul and decayed, that no repair could save it from destruction; whereas, in England, we had a noble and stately vessel, sailing proudly on the bosom of the ocean; that her main timbers were sound, though it was true, after so long a course of years, she might want some repairs. Mr. Tooke's motion was, — 'That we feel equal satisfaction that the subjects of England, by the virtuous exertions of their ancestors, have not so arduous a task to perform as the French have had, but have only to maintain and improve the Constitution which their ancestors have transmitted to them.' — This was carried unanimously."

The Trial of Warren Hastings still "dragged its slow length along," and in the May of this year Mr. Sheridan was called upon for his Reply on the Begum Charge. It was usual, on these occasions, for the Manager who spoke to be assisted by one of his brother Managers, whose task it was to carry the bag that contained his

CHAP. XVII.

1794.

papers, and to read out whatever Minutes might be referred to in the course of the argument. Mr. Michael Angelo Taylor was the person who undertook this office for Sheridan; but, on the morning of the speech, upon his asking for the bag that he was to carry, he was told by Sheridan that there was none — neither bag nor papers. They must manage, he said, as well as they could without them; — and when the papers were called for, his friend must only put the best countenance he could upon it. As for himself, "he would abuse Ned Law — ridicule Plumer's long orations — make the Court laugh — please the women, and, in short, with Taylor's aid, would get triumphantly through his task." His opening of the case was listened to with the profoundest attention; but when he came to contrast the evidence of the Commons with that adduced by Hastings, it was not long before the Chancellor interrupted him, with a request that the printed Minutes to which he referred should be read. Sheridan answered that his friend Mr. Taylor would read them; and Mr. Taylor affected to send for the bag, while the orator begged leave, in the mean time, to proceed. Again, however, his statements rendered a reference to the Minutes necessary, and again he was interrupted by the Chancellor, while an outcry after Mr. Sheridan's bag was

raised in all directions. At first the blame was laid on the solicitor's clerk; — then a messenger was dispatched to Mr. Sheridan's house. In the mean time, the orator was proceeding brilliantly and successfully in his argument, and, on some further interruption and expostulation from the Chancellor, raised his voice, and said, in a dignified tone, "On the part of the Commons, and as a Manager of this Impeachment, I shall conduct my case as I think proper. I mean to be correct; and Your Lordships, having the printed Minutes before you, will afterwards see whether I am right or wrong."

During the bustle produced by the inquiries after the bag, Mr. Fox, alarmed at the inconvenience which he feared the want of it might occasion to Sheridan, ran up from the Managers' room, and demanded eagerly the cause of this mistake from Mr. Taylor; who, hiding his mouth with his hand, whispered him, (in a tone of which they alone, who have heard this gentleman relate the anecdote, can feel the full humour,) "The man has no bag!"

The whole of this characteristic contrivance was evidently intended by Sheridan to raise that sort of surprise at the readiness of his resources, which it was the favourite triumph of his vanity to create. I have it on the authority of Mr. William Smythe, that, previously to the delivery

CHAP. XVII.

1794.

of this speech, he passed two or three days alone at Wanstead, so occupied from morning till night in writing and reading of papers, as to complain in the evenings that he "had motes before his eyes." This mixture of real labour with apparent carelessness was, indeed, one of the most curious features of his life and character.

Together with the political contests of this stormy year, he had also on his mind the cares of his new Theatre, which opened on the 21st of April, with a prologue, not by himself, as might have been expected, but by his friend General Fitzpatrick. He found time, however, to assist in the rapid manufacture of a little piece called "The Glorious First of June," which was acted immediately after Lord Howe's victory, and of which I have found some sketches * in

* One of these is as follows:—

"SCENE I. —— Miss *Leake* — Miss *Decamp* — *Walsh*.

"Short dialogue — Nancy persuading Susan to go to the Fair, where there is an entertainment to be given by the Lord of the Manor — Susan melancholy because Henry, her lover, is at sea with the British Admiral — *Song* — Her old mother scolds from the cottage — her little brother (*Walsh*) comes from the house with a message — laughs at his sister's fears and sings — *Trio*.

"SCENE II. —— *The Fair*.

"Puppet-show — dancing bear — bells — hurdy-gurdy — recruiting party — song and chorus.

his hand-writing, — though the dialogue was no doubt supplied (as Mr. Boaden says) by Cobb, or some other such *pedissequus* of the Dramatic Muse. This piece was written, rehearsed, and

---

" *Ballet* — D'Egville.

" Susan says she has no pleasure, and will go and take a solitary walk.

" Scene III. — *Dark wood.*

" Susan — gipsy — tells her fortune — recitative and ditty.

" Scene IV.

" Sea-Fight — hell and the devil!

" Henry and Susan meet — Chorus introducing burden,

" Rule Britannia."

Among other occasional trifles of this kind, to which Sheridan condescended for the advantage of the theatre, was the pantomime of Robinson Crusoe, brought out, I believe, in 1781, of which he is understood to have been the author. There was a practical joke in this pantomime (where, in pulling off a man's boot, the leg was pulled off with it,) which the famous Delpini laid claim to as his own, and publicly complained of Sheridan's having stolen it from him. The punsters of the day said it was claimed as literary property — being " in usum *Delpini*."

Another of these inglorious tasks of the author of The School for Scandal was the furnishing of the first outline or *Programme* of " The Forty Thieves." His brother-in-law, Ward, supplied the dialogue, and Mr. Colman was employed to season it with an infusion of jokes. The following is Sheridan's sketch of one of the scenes: —

" Ali Baba.

" Bannister called out of the cavern boldly by his son — comes out and falls on the ground a long time, not knowing

CHAP. XVII.

1794.

acted within three days. The first operation of Mr. Sheridan towards it was to order the mechanist of the theatre to get ready two fleets. It was in vain that objections were started to the possibility of equipping these paste-board armaments in so short an interval — Lord Chatham's famous order to Lord Anson was not more peremptory.* The two fleets were accordingly ready at the time, and the Duke of Clarence attended the rehearsal of their evolutions. This mixture of the cares of the Statesman and the Manager is one of those whimsical peculiarities that made Sheridan's own life so dramatic, and formed a

---

him — says he would only have taken a little gold to keep off misery and save his son, &c.

" Afterwards, when he loads his asses, his son reminds him to be moderate — but it was a promise made to thieves — ' it gets nearer the owner, if taken from the stealer ' — the son disputes this morality — ' they stole it, *ergo*, they have no right to it; and we steal it from the stealer, *ergo*, our title is twice as bad as theirs.' "

* For the expedition to the coast of France, after the Convention of Closter-seven. When he ordered the fleet to be equipped, and appointed the time and place of its rendezvous, Lord Anson said it would be impossible to have it prepared so soon. " It may," said Mr. Pitt, " be done; and if the ships are not ready at the time specified, I shall signify Your Lordship's neglect to the King, and impeach you in the House of Commons." This intimation produced the desired effect: the ships were ready. See *Anecdotes of Lord Chatham*, vol. i.

compound altogether too singular ever to occur again.

In the spring of the following year (1795) we find Mr. Sheridan paying that sort of tribute to the happiness of a first marriage, which is implied by the step of entering into a second. The lady to whom he now united himself was Miss Esther Jane Ogle, daughter of the Dean of Winchester, and grand-daughter, by the mother's side, of the former Bishop of Winchester. We have here another proof of the ready mine of wealth which the theatre opened, — as in gratitude it ought, — to him who had endowed it with such imperishable treasures. The fortune of the lady being five thousand pounds, he added to it fifteen thousand more, which he contrived to raise by the sale of Drury Lane shares; and the whole of the sum was subsequently laid out in the purchase, from Sir W. Geary, of the estate of Polesden, in Surrey, near Leatherhead. The Trustees of this settlement were Mr. Grey (now Lord Grey) and Mr. Whitbread.

To a man at the time of life which Sheridan had now attained — four years beyond that period at which Petrarch thought it decorous to leave off writing love-verses * — a union with a

* See his Epistle "ad Posteritatem," where, after lamenting the many years which he had devoted to love, he adds: "Mox vero ad *quadragesimum annum* appropinquans, dum adhuc et caloris satis esset," &c.

CHAP. XVII.

1795.

young and accomplished girl, ardently devoted to him, must have been like a renewal of his own youth; and it is said by those who were in habits of intimacy with him at this period, that they had seldom seen his spirits in a state of more buoyant vivacity. He passed much of his time at the house of his father-in-law near Southampton; — and in sailing about with his lively bride on the Southampton river, (in a small cutter called the Phædria, after the magic-boat in the "Fairy Queen,") forgot for a while his debts, his theatre, and his politics. It was on one of these occasions that my friend Mr. Bowles, who was a frequent companion of his parties*, wrote the following verses, which were much admired, as they well deserved to be, by Sheridan, for the sweetness of their thoughts and the perfect music of their rhythm: —

"Smooth went our boat upon the summer seas,
Leaving (for so it seem'd) the world behind,
Its cares, its sounds, its shadows: we reclin'd
Upon the sunny deck, heard but the breeze
That o'er us whispering pass'd, or idly play'd
With the lithe flag aloft. — A woodland scene
On either side drew its slope line of green,
And hung the water's shining edge with shade.

* Among other distinguished persons present at these excursions were Mr. Joseph Richardson, Dr. Howley, now Bishop of London, and Mrs. Wilmot, now Lady Dacre, a lady, whose various talents — not the less delightful for being feminine — like the group of the Graces, reflect beauty on each other.

Above the woods, Netley! thy ruins pale
  Peer'd, as we pass'd; and Vecta's * azure hue
  Beyond the misty castle † met the view;
Where in mid channel hung the scarce-seen sail.
  So all was calm and sunshine as we went
  Cheerily o'er the briny element.
Oh! were this little boat to us the world,
  As thus we wander'd far from sounds of care,
  Circled with friends and gentle maidens fair,
Whilst morning airs the waving pendant curl'd,
  How sweet were life's long voyage, till in peace
  We gained that haven still, where all things cease!"

The events of this year but added fresh impetus to that reaction upon each other of the Government and the people, which such a system of misrule is always sure to produce. Among the worst effects, as I have already remarked, of the rigorous policy adopted by the Minister, was the extremity to which it drove the principles and language of Opposition, and that sanction which the vehement rebound against oppression of such influencing spirits as Fox and Sheridan seemed to hold out to the obscurer and more practical assertors of freedom. This was at no time more remarkable than in the present Session, during the discussion of those arbitrary measures, the Treason and Sedition Bills, when sparks were struck out, in the colli-

* Isle of Wight. † Kelshot Castle.

CHAP. XVII.

1795.

sion of the two principles, which the combustible state of public feeling at the moment rendered not a little perilous. On the motion that the House should resolve itself into a Committee upon the Treason Bill, Mr. Fox said, that "if Ministers were determined, by means of the corrupt influence they already possessed in the two Houses of Parliament, to pass these Bills, in violent opposition to the declared sense of the great majority of the nation, and they should be put in force with all their rigorous provisions, — if his opinion were asked by the people as to their obedience, he should tell them, that it was no longer a question of moral obligation and duty, but of prudence." Mr. Sheridan followed in the bold footsteps of his friend, and said, that "if a degraded and oppressed majority of the people applied to him, he would advise them to acquiesce in those bills only as long as resistance was imprudent." This language was, of course, visited with the heavy reprobation of the Ministry; — but their own partisans had already gone as great lengths on the side of absolute power, and it is the nature of such extremes to generate each other. Bishop Horsley had preached the doctrine of passive obedience in the House of Lords, asserting, that "man's abuse of his delegated authority is to be borne with resignation, like any other of God's judgments; and that the

opposition of the individual to the sovereign power is an opposition to God's providential arrangements." The promotion of the Right Reverend Prelate that followed was not likely to abate his zeal in the cause of power; and, accordingly, we find him in the present session declaring, in his place in the House of Lords, that "the people have nothing to do with the laws but to obey them."

The government, too, had lately given countenance to writers, the absurd slavishness of whose doctrines would have sunk below contempt, but for such patronage. Among the ablest of them was Arthur Young, — one of those renegades from the cause of freedom, who, like the incendiary that set fire to the Temple with the flame he had stolen from its altar, turn the fame and the energies which they have acquired in *defence* of Liberty *against* her. This gentleman, to whom his situation as Secretary to the Board of Agriculture afforded facilities for the circulation of his political heresies, did not scruple, in one of his pamphlets, roundly to assert, that unequal representation, rotten boroughs, long parliaments, extravagant courts, selfish Ministers, and corrupt majorities, are not only intimately interwoven with the practical freedom of England, but, in a great degree, the causes of it.

CHAP. XVII.

1795.

But the most active and notorious of these patronised advocates of the Court was Mr. John Reeves, — a person who, in his capacity of President of the Association against Republicans and Levellers, had acted as a sort of Sub-minister of Alarm to Mr. Burke. In a pamphlet, entitled "Thoughts on the English Government," which Mr. Sheridan brought under the notice of the House, as a libel on the Constitution, this pupil of the school of Filmer advanced the startling doctrine that the Lords and Commons of England derive their existence and authority from the King, and that the Kingly government could go on, in all its functions, without them. This pitiful paradox found an apologist in Mr. Windham, whose chivalry in the new cause he had espoused left Mr. Pitt himself at a wondering distance behind. His speeches in defence of Reeves, (which are among the proofs that remain of that want of equipoise observable in his fine, rather than solid, understanding,) have been, with a judicious charity towards his memory, omitted in the authentic collection by Mr. Amyot.

When such libels against the Constitution were not only promulgated, but acted upon, on one side, it was to be expected, and hardly, perhaps, to be regretted, that the repercussion should be heard loudly and warningly from the

other. Mr. Fox, by a subsequent explanation, softened down all that was most menacing in his language; and, though the word "Resistance," at full length, should, like the hand-writing on the wall, be reserved for the last intoxication of the Belshazzars of this world, a letter or two of it may, now and then, glare out upon their eyes, without producing any thing worse than a salutary alarm amid their revels. At all events, the high and constitutional grounds on which Mr. Fox defended the expressions he had hazarded, may well reconcile us to any risk incurred by their utterance. The tribute to the house of Russell, in the grand and simple passage beginning, "Dear to this country are the descendants of the illustrious Russell," is as applicable to that Noble family now as it was then; and will continue to be so, I trust, as long as a single vestige of a race, so pledged to the cause of liberty, remains.

In one of Mr. Sheridan's speeches on the subject of Reeves's libel, there are some remarks on the character of the people of England, not only candid and just, but, as applied to them at that trying crisis, interesting: —

"Never was there," he said, "any country in which there was so much absence of public principle, and at the same time so many instances of private worth. Never was there so much charity and humanity towards the

CHAP. XVII.

1795.

poor and the distressed; any act of cruelty or oppression never failed to excite a sentiment of general indignation against its authors. It was a circumstance peculiarly strange, that though luxury had arrived to such a pitch, it had so little effect in depraving the hearts and destroying the morals of people in private life; and almost every day produced some fresh example of generous feelings and noble exertions of benevolence. Yet, amidst these phenomena of private virtue, it was to be remarked, that there was an almost total want of public spirit, and a most deplorable contempt of public principle. * * * * * * * * When Great Britain fell, the case would not be with her as with Rome in former times. When Rome fell, she fell by the weight of her own vices. The inhabitants were so corrupted and degraded, as to be unworthy of a continuance of prosperity, and incapable to enjoy the blessings of liberty; their minds were bent to the state in which a reverse of fortune placed them. But when Great Britain falls, she will fall with a people full of private worth and virtue; she will be ruined by the profligacy of the governors, and the security of her inhabitants, — the consequence of those pernicious doctrines which have taught her to place a false confidence in her strength and freedom, and not to look with distrust and apprehension to the misconduct and corruption of those to whom she has trusted the management of her resources."

To this might have been added, that when Great Britain falls, it will not be from either ignorance of her rights, or insensibility to their value, but from that want of energy to assert them which a high state of civilisation produces.

The love of ease that luxury brings along with it,—the selfish and compromising spirit, in which the members of a polished society countenance each other, and which reverses the principle of patriotism, by sacrificing public interests to private ones,—the substitution of intellectual for moral excitement, and the repression of enthusiasm by fastidiousness and ridicule,—these are among the causes that undermine a people,—that corrupt in the very act of enlightening them; till they become, what a French writer calls "*esprit exigeans et caractères complaisans,*" and the period in which their rights are best understood may be that in which they most easily surrender them. It is, in truth, with the advanced age of free States, as with that of individuals,—they improve in the theory of their existence as they grow unfit for the practice of it; till, at last, deceiving themselves with the semblance of rights gone by, and refining upon the forms of their institutions after they have lost the substance, they smoothly sink into slavery, with the lessons of liberty on their lips.

Besides the Treason and Sedition Bills, the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act was another of the momentous questions, which, in this as well as the preceding Session, were chosen as points of assault by Mr. Sheridan, and contested with a vigour and reiteration of attack, which,

CHAP. XVII.

1795.

though unavailing against the massy majorities of the Minister, yet told upon public opinion so as to turn even defeats to account.

The marriage of the Prince of Wales to the Princess Caroline of Brunswick having taken place in the spring of this year, it was proposed, by His Majesty to Parliament, not only to provide an establishment for their Royal Highnesses, but to decide on the best manner of liquidating the debts of the Prince, which were calculated at 630,000*l.* On the secession of the leading Whigs, in 1792, His Royal Highness had also separated himself from Mr. Fox, and held no further intercourse either with him or any of his party,—except, occasionally, Mr. Sheridan,—till so late, I believe, as the year 1798. The effects of his estrangement are sufficiently observable in the tone of the Opposition throughout the debates on the Message of the King. Mr. Grey said, that he would not oppose the granting of an establishment to the Prince equal to that of his ancestors; but neither would he consent to the payment of his debts by Parliament. A refusal, he added, to liberate His Royal Highness from his embarrassments would certainly prove a mortification; but it would, at the same time, awaken a just sense of his imprudence. Mr. Fox asked, "Was the Prince well advised in applying to that House on the subject

of his debts, after the promise made in 1787?" — and Mr. Sheridan, while he agreed with his friends that the application should not have been made to Parliament, still gave it as his "positive opinion that the debts ought to be paid immediately, for the dignity of the country and the situation of the Prince, who ought not to be seen rolling about the streets, in his state-coach, as an insolvent prodigal." With respect to the promise given in 1787, and now violated, that the Prince would not again apply to Parliament for the payment of his debts, Mr. Sheridan, with a communicativeness that seemed hardly prudent, put the House in possession of some details of the transaction, which, as giving an insight into Royal character, are worthy of being extracted.

"In 1787 a pledge was given to the House that no more debts should be contracted. By that pledge the Prince was bound as much as if he had given it knowingly and voluntarily. To attempt any explanation of it now would be unworthy of his honour, — as if he had suffered it to be wrung from him, with a view of afterwards pleading that it was against his better judgment, in order to get rid of it. He then advised the Prince not to make any such promise, because it was not to be expected that he could himself enforce the details of a system of economy; and, although he had men of honour and abilities about him, he was totally unprovided with men of business, adequate to such a task. The Prince said he could not give such a pledge, and agree

CHAP. XVII.

1795.

at the same time to take back his establishment. He (Mr. Sheridan) drew up a plan of retrenchment, which was approved of by the Prince, and afterwards by His Majesty; and the Prince told him that the promise was not to be insisted upon. In the King's Message, however, the promise was inserted, — by whose advice he knew not. He heard it read with surprise, and, on being asked next day by the Prince to contradict it in his place, he enquired whether the Prince had seen the Message before it was brought down. Being told that it had been read to him, but that he did not understand it as containing a promise, he declined contradicting it, and told the Prince that he must abide by it, in whatever way it might have been obtained. By the plan then settled, Ministers had a check upon the Prince's expenditure, which they never exerted, nor enforced adherence to the plan. * * * * *

While Ministers never interfered to check expenses, of which they could not pretend ignorance, the Prince had recourse to means for relieving himself from his embarrassments, which ultimately tended to increase them. It was attempted to raise a loan for him in foreign countries, a measure which he thought unconstitutional, and put a stop to; and, after a consultation with Lord Loughborough, all the bonds were burnt, although with a considerable loss to the Prince. After that, another plan of retrenchment was proposed, upon which he had frequent consultations with Lord Thurlow, who gave the Prince fair, open, and manly advice. That Noble Lord told the Prince, that, after the promise he had made, he must not think of applying to Parliament; — that he must avoid being of any party in politics, but, above all, exposing himself to the suspicion of being influenced in political opinion by his embarrassments; —

that the only course he could pursue with honour, was to retire from public life for a time, and appropriate the greater part of his income to the liquidation of his debts. This plan was agreed upon in the autumn of 1792. Why, it might be asked, was it not carried into effect? About that period His Royal Highness began to receive unsolicited advice from another quarter. He was told by Lord Loughborough, both in words and in writing, that the plan favoured too much of the advice given to M. Egalité, and he could guess from what quarter it came. For his own part, he was then of opinion, that to have avoided meddling in the great political questions which were then coming to be discussed, and to have put his affairs in a train of adjustment, would have better become his high station, and tended more to secure public respect to it, than the pageantry of state-liveries."

The few occasions on which the name of Mr. Sheridan was again connected with literature, after the final investment of his genius in political speculations, were such as his fame might have easily dispensed with; — and one of them, the forgery of the Shakspeare papers, occurred in the course of the present year. Whether it was that he looked over these manuscripts with the eye more of a manager than of a critic, and considered rather to what account the belief in their authenticity might be turned, than how far it was founded upon internal evidence; — or whether, as Mr. Ireland asserts, the standard at which he rated the genius of Shakspeare was not so high as to inspire him with a very watch-

CHAP. XVII.

1796.

ful fastidiousness of judgment; — certain it is that he was, in some degree, the dupe of this remarkable imposture, which, as a lesson to the self-confidence of criticism, and an exposure of the fallibility of taste, ought never to be forgotten in literary history.

The immediate payment of 300*l.*, and a moiety of the profits for the first sixty nights, were the terms upon which Mr. Sheridan purchased the play of Vortigern from the Irelands. The latter part of the conditions was voided the first night; and, though it is more than probable that a genuine tragedy of Shakspeare, if presented under similar circumstances, would have shared the same fate, the public enjoyed the credit of detecting and condemning a counterfeit, which had passed current through some of the most learned and tasteful hands of the day. It is but justice, however, to Mr. Sheridan to add, that, according to the account of Ireland himself, he was not altogether without misgivings during his perusal of the manuscripts, and that his name does not appear among the signatures to that attestation of their authenticity, which his friend Dr. Parr drew up, and was himself the first to sign. The curious statement of Mr. Ireland, with respect to Sheridan's want of enthusiasm for Shakspeare, receives some confirmation from the testimony of Mr. Boaden, the biographer of

Kemble, who tells us that "Kemble frequently expressed to him his wonder that Sheridan should trouble himself *so little* about Shakspeare." This peculiarity of taste, — if it really existed to the degree that these two authorities would lead us to infer, — affords a remarkable coincidence with the opinions of another illustrious genius, lately lost to the world, whose admiration of the great Demiurge of the Drama was leavened with the same sort of heresy.

In the January of this year, Mr. William Stone — the brother of the gentleman whose letter from Paris has been given in a preceding Chapter — was tried upon a charge of High Treason, and Mr. Sheridan was among the witnesses summoned for the prosecution. He had already in the year 1794, in consequence of a reference from Mr. Stone himself, been examined before the Privy Council, relative to a conversation which he had held with that gentleman, and, on the day after his examination, had, at the request of Mr. Dundas, transmitted to that minister in writing the particulars of his testimony before the Council. There is among his papers a rough draft of this Statement, in comparing which with his evidence upon the trial in the present year, I find rather a curious proof of the faithlessness of even the best memories. The object of the conversation which he had held with

CHAP. XVII.

1796.

Mr. Stone in 1794 — and which constituted the whole of their intercourse with each other — was a proposal on the part of the latter, submitted also to Lord Lauderdale and others, to exert his influence in France, through those channels which his brother's residence there opened to him, for the purpose of averting the threatened invasion of England, by representing to the French rulers the utter hopelessness of such an attempt. Mr. Sheridan, on the trial, after an ineffectual request to be allowed to refer to his written Statement, gave the following as part of his recollection of the conversation: —

"Mr. Stone stated that, in order to effect this purpose, he had endeavoured to collect the opinions of several gentlemen, political characters in this country, whose opinions he thought would be of authority sufficient to advance his object; that for this purpose he had had interviews with different gentlemen: he named Mr. Smith and, I think, one or two more, whose names I do not now recollect. He named some gentleman connected with Administration — if the Counsel will remind me of the name —— ."

Here Mr. Law, the examining Counsel, remarked, that "upon the cross-examination, if the gentlemen knew the circumstance, they would mention it." The cross-examination of Sheridan by Sergeant Adair was as follows: —

"You stated in the course of your examination that Mr. Stone said there was a gentleman connected with Government, to whom he had made a similar communication, should you recollect the name of that person if you were reminded of it? — I certainly should. — Was it General Murray? — General Murray certainly."

Notwithstanding this, however, it appears from the written Statement in my possession, drawn up soon after the conversation in question, that this "gentleman connected with Government," so difficult to be remembered, was no other than the Prime Minister, Mr. Pitt himself. So little is the memory to be relied upon in evidence, particularly when absolved from responsibility by the commission of its deposit to writing. The conduct of Mr. Sheridan throughout this transaction appears to have been sensible and cautious. That he was satisfied with it himself may be collected from the conclusion of his letter to Mr. Dundas: — "Under the circumstances in which the application (from Mr. Dundas) has been made to me, I have thought it equally a matter of respect to that application and of respect to myself, as well as of justice to the person under suspicion, to give this relation more in detail than at first perhaps might appear necessary. My own conduct in the matter not being in question, I can only say that were a similar case to occur, I think I should

CHAP. XVII.

act in every circumstance precisely in the manner I did on this occasion."

1796-7.

His parliamentary exertions this year, though various and active, were chiefly upon subordinate questions; and, except in the instance of Mr. Fox's Motion of Censure upon Ministers for advancing money to the Emperor without the consent of Parliament, were not distinguished by any signal or sustained displays of eloquence. The grand questions, indeed, connected with the liberty of the subject, had been so hotly contested, that but few new grounds were left on which to renew the conflict. Events, however, — the only teachers of the great mass of mankind, — were beginning to effect what eloquence had in vain attempted. The people of England, though generally eager for war, are seldom long in discovering that "the cup but sparkles near the brim;" and in the occurrences of the following year they were made to taste the full bitterness of the draught. An alarm for the solvency of the Bank, an impending invasion, a mutiny in the fleet, and an organised rebellion in Ireland, — such were the fruits of four years' warfare, and they were enough to startle even the most sanguine and precipitate into reflection.

The conduct of Mr. Sheridan on the breaking out of the Mutiny at the Nore is too well known

and appreciated to require any illustration here. It is placed to his credit on the page of history, and was one of the happiest impulses of good feeling and good sense combined, that ever public man acted upon in a situation demanding so much of both. The patriotic promptitude of his interference was even more striking than it appears in the record of his parliamentary labours; for, as I have heard at but one remove from his own authority, while the Ministry were yet hesitating as to the steps they should take, he went to Mr. Dundas and said, — "My advice is that you cut the buoys on the river — send Sir Charles Grey down to the coast, and set a price on Parker's head. If the Administration take this advice instantly, they will save the country — if not they will lose it; and, on their refusal, I will impeach them in the House of Commons this very evening."

Without dwelling on the contrast which is so often drawn — less with a view to elevate Sheridan than to depreciate his party — between the conduct of himself and his friends at this fearful crisis, it is impossible not to concede that, on the scale of public spirit, he rose as far superior to them as the great claims of the general safety transcend all personal considerations and all party ties. It was, indeed, a rare triumph of temper and sagacity. With less temper, he would

CHAP. XVII.

1797.

have seen in this awful peril but an occasion of triumph over the Minister whom he had so long been struggling to overturn — and, with less sagacity, he would have thrown away the golden opportunity of establishing himself for ever in the affections and the memories of Englishmen, as one whose heart was in the common-weal, whatever might be his opinions, and who, in the moment of peril, could sink the partisan in the patriot.

As soon as he had performed this exemplary duty, he joined Mr. Fox and the rest of his friends, who had seceded from Parliament about a week before, on the very day after the rejection of Mr. Grey's motion for a Reform. This step, which was intended to create a strong sensation, by hoisting, as it were, the signal of despair to the country, was followed by no such striking effects, and left little behind but a question as to its prudence and patriotism. The public saw, however, with pleasure, that there were still a few champions of the Constitution, who did not "leave her fair side all unguarded" in this extremity. Mr. Tierney, among others, remained at his post, encountering Mr. Pitt on financial questions, with a vigour and address to which the latter had been hitherto unaccustomed, and perfecting by practice that shrewd power of analysis, which has made him so for-

midable a sifter of ministerial sophistries ever since. Sir Francis Burdett, too, was just then entering into his noble career of patriotism; and, like the youthful servant of the temple in Euripides, was aiming his first shafts at those unclean birds, that settle within the sanctuary of the Constitution and sully its treasures:—

" πτηνων τ' αγαλας
'Α βλαπτουσιν
Σεμν' αναθηματα."

By a letter from the Earl of Moira to Col. M'Mahon in the summer of this year it appears, that, in consequence of the calamitous state of the country, a plan had been in agitation among some members of the House of Commons, who had hitherto supported the measures of the Minister, to form an entirely new Administration, of which the Noble Earl was to be at the head, and from which both Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox, as equally obnoxious to the public, were to be excluded. The only materials that appear to have been forthcoming for this new Cabinet were Lord Moira himself, Lord Thurlow, and Sir William Pulteney — the last of whom it was intended to make Chancellor of the Exchequer. Such a tottering balance of parties, however, could not have been long maintained; and its relapse, after a short interval, into Toryism

CHAP. XVII.

1797.

would but have added to the triumph of Mr. Pitt, and increased his power. Accordingly Lord Moira, who saw from the beginning the delicacy and difficulty of the task, wisely abandoned it. The share that Mr. Sheridan had in this transaction is too honourable to him not to be recorded, and the particulars cannot be better given than in Lord Moira's own words: —

"You say that Mr. Sheridan has been traduced as wishing to abandon Mr. Fox, and to promote a new Administration. I had accidentally a conversation with that gentleman at the House of Lords. I remonstrated strongly with him against a principle which I heard Mr. Fox's friends intended to lay down, namely, that they would support a new Administration, but that not any of them would take part in it. I solemnly declare, upon my honour, that I could not shake Mr. Sheridan's conviction of the propriety of that determination. He said that he and Mr. Fox's other friends, as well as Mr. Fox himself, would give the most energetic support to such an Administration as was in contemplation; but that their acceptance of office would appear an acquiescence under the injustice of the interdict supposed to be fixed upon Mr. Fox. I did not and never can admit the fairness of that argument. But I gained nothing upon Mr. Sheridan, to whose uprightness in that respect I can therefore bear the most decisive testimony. Indeed I am ashamed of offering testimony, where suspicion ought not to have been conceived."

CHAP. XVIII.

PLAY OF "THE STRANGER." — SPEECHES IN PARLIAMENT. — PIZARRO. — MINISTRY OF MR. ADDINGTON. — FRENCH INSTITUTE. — NEGOTIATION WITH MR. KEMBLE.

THE theatrical season of 1798 introduced to the public the German drama of "The Stranger," translated by Mr. Thompson, and (as we are told by this gentleman in his preface) altered and improved by Sheridan. There is reason, however, to believe that the contributions of the latter to the dialogue were much more considerable than he was perhaps willing to let the translator acknowledge. My friend Mr. Rogers has heard him, on two different occasions, declare that he had written every word of The Stranger from beginning to end; and, as his vanity could not be much interested in such a claim, it is possible that there was at least some virtual foundation for it.

The song introduced in this play, "I have a silent sorrow here," was avowedly written by Sheridan, as the music of it was by the Duchess of Devonshire — two such names, so brilliant in

CHAP. XVIII.

1798.

their respective spheres, as the Muses of Song and Verse have seldom had the luck to bring together. The originality of these lines has been disputed; and that expedient of borrowing, which their author *ought* to have been independent of in every way, is supposed to have been resorted to by his indolence on this occasion. Some verses by Tickell are mentioned as having supplied one of the best stanzas; but I am inclined to think, from the following circumstances, that this theft of Sheridan was of that venial and domestic kind — from himself. A writer, who brings forward the accusation in The Gentleman's Magazine (vol. lxxi. p. 904.), thus states his grounds: —

"In a song which I purchased at Bland's music-shop in Holborn in the year 1794, intitled, 'Think not, my Love,' and professing to be set to music by Thomas Wright, (I conjecture, Organist of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and composer of the pretty Opera called Rusticity,) are the following words: —

"'This treasur'd grief, this lov'd despair,
My lot for ever be;
But, dearest, may the pangs I bear
Be never known to thee!'

"Now, without insisting that the opening thought in Mr. Sheridan's famous song has been borrowed from that of 'Think not, my Love,' the second verse is mani-

festly such a theft of the lines I have quoted as entirely overturns Mr. Sheridan's claim to originality in the matter; unless 'Think not, my Love,' has been written by him, and he can be proved to have only stolen from himself."

The song to which the writer alludes, "Think not, my Love," was given to me, as a genuine production of Mr. Sheridan, by a gentleman nearly connected with his family; and I have little doubt of its being one of those early love-strains which, in his *tempo de' dolci sospiri*, he addressed to Miss Linley. As, therefore, it was but "a feather of his own" that the eagle made free with, he may be forgiven. The following is the whole of the song:—

"Think not, my love, when secret grief
Preys on my sadden'd heart,
Think not I wish a mean relief,
Or would from sorrow part.

"Dearly I prize the sighs sincere,
That my true fondness prove,
Nor would I wish to check the tear,
That flows from hapless love!

"Alas! tho' doom'd to hope in vain
The joys that love requite,
Yet will I cherish all its pain,
With sad, but dear delight.

CHAP. XVIII.

1798.

" This treasur'd grief, this lov'd despair,
My lot for ever be;
But, dearest, may the pangs I bear
Be never known to thee!"

Among the political events of this year the rebellion of Ireland holds a memorable and fearful pre-eminence. The only redeeming stipulation which the Duke of Portland and his brother Alarmists had annexed to their ill-judged Coalition with Mr. Pitt was, that a system of conciliation and justice should, at last, be adopted towards Ireland. Had they but carried thus much wisdom into the ministerial ranks with them, their defection might have been pardoned for the good it achieved, and, in one respect, at least, would have resembled the policy of those Missionaries, who join in the ceremonies of the Heathen for the purpose of winning him over to the truth. On the contrary, however, the usual consequence of such coalitions with Power ensued, — the good was absorbed in the evil principle, and by the false hope which it created, but increased the mischief. Lord Fitzwilliam was not only deceived himself, but, still worse to a noble and benevolent nature like his, was made the instrument of deception and mockery to millions. His recall, in 1795, assisted by the measures of his successor, drove Ireland into the rebellion which raged during the present year,

and of which the causes have been so little removed from that hour to this, that if the people have become too wise to look back to it, as an example, it is assuredly not because their rulers have much profited by it, as a lesson.

I am aware that, on the subject of Ireland and her wrongs, I can ill trust myself with the task of expressing what I feel, or preserve that moderate, historical tone," which it has been my wish to maintain through the political opinions of this work. On every other point, my homage to the high character of England, and of her Institutions, is prompt and cordial; — on this topic alone my feelings towards her have been taught to wear "the badge of bitterness." As a citizen of the world, I would point to England as its brightest ornament, — but, as a disfranchised Irishman, I blush to belong to her. Instead, therefore, of hazarding any farther reflections of my own on the causes and character of the Rebellion of 1798, I shall content myself with giving an extract from a Speech which Mr. Sheridan delivered on the subject, in the June of that year: —

"What! when conciliation was held out to the people of Ireland, was there any discontent? When the Government of Ireland was agreeable to the people, was there any discontent? After the prospect of that conciliation was taken away, — after Lord Fitzwilliam was

CHAP. XVIII.

1798.

recalled, — after the hopes which had been raised were blasted, — when the spirit of the people was beaten down, insulted, despised, I will ask any gentleman to point out a single act of conciliation which has emanated from the Government of Ireland? On the contrary, has not that country exhibited one continual scene of the most grievous oppression, of the most vexatious proceedings; arbitrary punishments inflicted; torture declared necessary by the highest authority in the sister-kingdom next to that of the legislature? And do gentlemen say that the indignant spirit which is roused by such exercise of government is unprovoked? Is this conciliation? is this lenity? Has every thing been done to avert the evils of rebellion? It is the fashion to say, and the Address holds the same language, that the rebellion which now rages in the sister-kingdom has been owing to the machinations of 'wicked men.' Agreeing to the amendment proposed, it was my first intention to move that these words should be omitted. But, sir, the fact they assert is true. It is, indeed, to the measures of wicked men that the deplorable state of Ireland is to be imputed. It is to those wicked Ministers who have broken the promises they held out; who betrayed the party they seduced into their views, to be the instruments of the foulest treachery that ever was practised against any people. It is to those wicked Ministers who have given up that devoted country to plunder, — resigned it a prey to this faction, by which it has so long been trampled upon, and abandoned it to every species of insult and oppression by which a country was ever overwhelmed, or the spirit of a people insulted, that we owe the miseries into which Ireland is plunged, and the dangers by which England is threatened. These evils are the doings of wicked Ministers, and applied to

them, the language of the Address records a fatal and melancholy truth."

The popularity which the conduct of Mr. Sheridan, on the occasion of the Mutiny, had acquired for him, — every where, but among his own immediate party, — seems to have produced a sort of thaw in the rigour of his opposition to Government; and the language which he now began to hold, with respect to the power and principles of France, was such as procured for him, more than once in the course of the present Session, the unaccustomed tribute of compliments from the Treasury-bench. Without, in the least degree, questioning his sincerity in this change of tone, it may be remarked, that the most watchful observer of the tide of public opinion could not have taken it at the turn more seasonably or skilfully. There was, indeed, just at this time a sensible change in the feeling of the country. The dangers to which it had been reduced were great, but the crisis seemed over. The new wings lent to Credit by the paper-currency, — the return of the navy to discipline and victory, — the disenchantment that had taken place with respect to French principles, and the growing persuasion, since strengthened into conviction, that the world has never committed a more gross mistake than in looking to the French

as teachers of liberty, — the insulting reception of the late pacific overtures at Lisle, and that never-failing appeal to the pride and spirit of Englishmen, which a threat of invading their sacred shore brings with it, — all these causes concurred, at this moment, to rally the people of England round the Government, and enabled the Minister to extract from the very mischiefs which himself had created the spirit of all others most competent to bear and surmount them. Such is the elasticity of a free country, however, for the moment misgoverned; — and the only glory due to the Minister under whom such a people, in spite of misgovernment, flourishes, is that of having proved, by the experiment, how difficult it is to ruin them.

While Mr. Sheridan took these popular opportunities of occasionally appearing before the public, Mr. Fox persevered, with but little interruption, in his plan of secession from Parliament altogether. From the beginning of the Session of this year, when, at the instance of his constituents, he appeared in his place to oppose the Assessed Taxes Bill, till the month of February, 1800, he raised his voice in the House but upon two questions, — each "dignus vindice," — the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, and a Change of System in Ireland. He had thrown into his opposition too much real feeling and earnestness to

be able, like Sheridan, to soften it down, or shape it to the passing temper of the times. In the harbour of private life alone could that swell subside; and however the country missed his warning eloquence, there is little doubt that his own mind and heart were gainers by a retirement, in which he had leisure to "prune the ruffled wings" of his benevolent spirit, — to exchange the ambition of being great for that of being useful, and to listen only to the lessons of a mild wisdom, of which, had his life been prolonged, his country would have felt the full influence.

From one of Sheridan's speeches at this time we find that the change which had lately taken place in his public conduct had given rise to some unworthy imputations upon his motives. There are few things less politic in an eminent public man than a too great readiness to answer accusations against his character. For, as he is, in general, more extensively read or heard than his accusers, the first intimation, in most cases, that the public receives of any charge against him will be from his own answer to it. Neither does the evil rest here; — for the calumny remains embalmed in the defence, long after its own ephemeral life is gone. To this unlucky sort of sensitiveness Mr. Sheridan was but too much disposed to give way, and accordingly has been himself the chronicler of many charges against

CHAP. XVIII.

1798.

him, of which we should have been otherwise wholly ignorant. Of this nature were the imputations founded on his alleged misunderstanding with the Duke of Portland, in 1789, to which I have already made some allusion, and of which we should have known nothing but for his own notice of it. His vindication of himself, in 1795, from the suspicion of being actuated by self-interest, in his connection with the Prince, or of having received from him (to use his own expressions) "so much as the present of a horse or a picture," is another instance of the same kind, where he has given substance and perpetuity to rumour, and marked out the track of an obscure calumny, which would otherwise have been forgotten. At the period immediately under our consideration he has equally enabled us to collect, from his gratuitous defence of himself, that the line lately taken by him in Parliament, on the great questions of the Mutiny and Invasion, had given rise to suspicions of his political steadiness, and to rumours of his approaching separation from Mr. Fox.

"I am sorry," he said, on one occasion, "that it is hardly possible for any man to speak in this House, and to obtain credit for speaking from a principle of public spirit; that no man can oppose a Minister without being accused of faction, and none, who usually opposed, can support a Minister, or lend him assistance in any thing,

without being accused of doing so from interested motives. I am not such a coxcomb as to say, that it is of much importance what part I may take; or that it is essential that I should divide a little popularity, or some emolument, with the Ministers of the Crown; nor am I so vain as to imagine, that my services might be solicited. Certainly they have not. That might have arisen from want of importance in myself; or from others, whom I have been in the general habit of opposing, conceiving that I was not likely either to give up my general sentiments, or my personal attachments. However that may be, certain it is, they never have made any attempt to apply to me for my assistance."

In reviewing his parliamentary exertions during this year, it would be injustice to pass over his speech on the Assessed Taxes Bill, in which, among other fine passages, the following vehement burst of eloquence occurs: —

"But we have gained, forsooth, several ships by the victory of the First of June, — by the capture of Toulon, — by the acquisition of those charnel-houses in the West Indies, in which 50,000 men have been lost to this country. Consider the price which has been paid for these successes. For these boasted successes, I will say, give me back the blood of Englishmen which has been shed in this fatal contest, — give me back the 250 millions of debt which it has occasioned, — give me back the honour of the country, which has been tarnished, — give me back the credit of the country, which has been destroyed, — give me back the solidity of the Bank of England, which has been overthrown; the attachment of

CHAP. XVIII.

1799.

the people to their ancient Constitution, which has been shaken by acts of oppression and tyrannical laws, — give me back the kingdom of Ireland, the connexion of which is endangered by a cruel and outrageous system of military coercion, — give me back that pledge of eternal war, which must be attended with inevitable ruin!"

The great success which had attended The Stranger, and the still increasing taste for the German Drama, induced Mr. Sheridan, in the present year, to embark his fame even still more responsibly in a venture to the same romantic shores. The play of Pizarro was brought out on the 24th of May, 1799. The heroic interest of the plot, the splendour of the pageantry, and some skilful appeals to public feeling in the dialogue, obtained for it at once a popularity which has seldom been equalled. As far, indeed, as multiplied representations and editions are a proof of success, the legitimate issue of his Muse might well have been jealous of the fame and fortune of their spurious German relative. When the author of The Critic made Puff say, "Now for my magnificence, — my noise and my procession!" he little anticipated the illustration which, in twenty years afterwards, his own example would afford to that ridicule. Not that in pageantry, when tastefully and subordinately introduced, there is any thing to which criticism can fairly object: — it is the dialogue

of this play that is unworthy of its author, and ought never, from either motives of profit or the vanity of success, to have been coupled with his name. The style in which it is written belongs neither to verse or prose, but is a sort of amphibious native of both, — neither gliding gracefully through the former element, nor walking steadily on the other. In order to give pomp to the language, inversion is substituted for metre; and one of the worst faults of poetry, a superfluity of epithet, is adopted, without that harmony which alone makes it venial or tolerable.

It is some relief, however, to discover, from the manuscripts in my possession, that Mr. Sheridan's responsibility for the defects of Pizarro is not very much greater than his claim to a share in its merits. In the plot, and the arrangement of the scenes, it is well known, there is but little alteration from the German original. The omission of the comic scene of Diego, which Kotzebue himself intended to omit, — the judicious suppression of Elvira's love for Alonzo, — the introduction, so striking in representation, of Rolla's passage across the bridge, and the re-appearance of Elvira in the habit of a nun, — form, I believe, the only important points in which the play of Mr. Sheridan deviates from the structure of the original drama. With respect to the dialogue, his share in its composition is reducible

CHAP. XVIII.

1799.

to a compass not much more considerable. A few speeches, and a few short scenes re-written, constitute almost the whole of the contribution he has furnished to it. The manuscript translation, or rather imitation, of "The Spaniards in Peru," which he used as the ground-work of Pizarro, has been preserved among his papers; — and, so convenient was it to his indolence to take the style as he found it, that, except, as I have said, in a few speeches and scenes, which might be easily enumerated, he adopted, with scarcely any alteration, the exact words of the translator, whose taste, therefore, (whoever he may have been,) is answerable for the spirit and style of three-fourths of the dialogue. Even that scene where Cora describes the "white buds" and "crimson blossoms" of her infant's teeth, which I have often heard cited as a specimen of Sheridan's false ornament, is indebted to this unknown paraphrast for the whole of its embroidery.

But though he is found to be innocent of much of the contraband matter, with which his co-partner in this work had already vitiated it, his own contributions to the dialogue are not of a much higher or purer order. He seems to have written down to the model before him, and to have been inspired by nothing but an emulation of its faults. His style, accordingly, is kept

hovering in the same sort of limbo, between blank verse and prose; — while his thoughts and images, however shining and effective on the stage, are like the diamonds of theatrical royalty, and will not bear inspection off it. The scene between Alonzo and Pizarro, in the third act, is one of those almost entirely re-written by Sheridan; and the following medley group of personification affords a specimen of the style to which his taste could descend: —

"Then would I point out to him where now, in clustered villages, they live like brethren, social and confiding, while through the burning day Content sits basking on the cheek of Toil, till laughing Pastime leads them to the hour of rest."

The celebrated harangue of Rolla to the Peruvians, into which Kemble used to infuse such heroic dignity, is an amplification of the following sentences of the original, as I find them given in Lewis's manuscript translation of the play: —

"*Rolla.* You Spaniards fight for gold; we for our country.

"*Alonzo.* They follow an adventurer to the field; we a monarch whom we love.

"*Atalib.* And a god whom we adore!"

This speech, to whose popular sentiments the play owed much of its success, was chiefly made up by Sheridan of loans from his own oratory. The image of the Vulture and the Lamb was taken, as I have already remarked, from a passage in his speech on the trial of Hastings: — and he had, on the subject of Invasion, in the preceding year (1798) delivered more than once the substance of those patriotic sentiments, which were now so spirit-stirring in the mouth of Rolla. For instance, on the King's Message relative to preparation for Invasion: —

"The Directory may instruct their guards to make the fairest professions of how their army is to act; but of these professions surely not one can be believed. The victorious Buonaparte may say that he comes like a minister of grace, with no other purpose than to give peace to the cottager, to restore citizens to their rights, to establish real freedom, and a liberal and humane government. But can there be an Englishman so stupid, so besotted, so befooled, as to give a moment's credit to such ridiculous professions? . . . . . What, then, is their object? They come for what they really want: they come for ships, for commerce, for credit, and for capital. Yes; they come for the sinews, the bones — for the marrow and the very heart's blood of Great Britain. But let us examine what we are to purchase at this price. Liberty, it appears, is now their staple commodity: but attend, I say, and examine how little of real liberty they themselves enjoy, who are so forward and prodigal in bestowing it on others."

The speech of Rolla in the prison scene is also an interpolation of his own, — Kotzebue having, far more judiciously, (considering the unfitness of the moment for a *tirade*) condensed the reflections of Rolla into the short exclamation, "Oh, sacred Nature! thou art still true to thyself," and then made him hurry into the prison to his friend.

Of the translation of this play by Lewis, which has been found among the papers, Mr. Sheridan does not appear to have made any use; — except in so far as it may have suggested to him the idea of writing a song for Cora, of which that gentleman had set him an example in a ballad, beginning

> "Soft are thy slumbers, soft and sweet,
> Hush thee, hush thee, hush thee, boy."

The song of Mr. Lewis, however, is introduced, with somewhat less violence to probability, at the beginning of the Third Act, where the women are waiting for the tidings of the battle, and when the intrusion of a ballad from the heroine, though sufficiently unnatural, is not quite so monstrous as in the situation which Sheridan has chosen for it.

The following stanza, formed a part of the song, as it was originally written: —

CHAP. XVIII.

1799.

" Those eyes that beam'd this morn the light of youth,
This morn I saw their gentle rays impart
The day-spring sweet of hope, of love, of truth,
The pure Aurora of my lover's heart.
Yet wilt thou rise, oh Sun, and waste thy light,
While my Alonzo's beams are quench'd in night."

The only question upon which he spoke this year was the important measure of the Union, which he strenuously and at great length opposed. Like every other measure, professing to be for the benefit of Ireland, the Union has been left incomplete in the one essential point, without which there is no hope of peace or prosperity for that country. As long as religious disqualification is left to " lie like lees at the bottom of men's hearts *," in vain doth the voice of Parliament pronounce the word " Union" to the two islands, a feeling, deep as the sea that breaks between them, answers back, sullenly, " Separation."

Through the remainder of Mr. Sheridan's political career it is my intention, for many reasons, to proceed with a more rapid step; and merely to give the particulars of his public conduct, together with such documents as I can

* " It lay like lees at the bottom of men's hearts: and, if the vessel was but stirred, it would come up." — BACON, *Henry VII.*

bring to illustrate it, without entering into much discussion or comment on either.

Of his speeches in 1800, — during which year, on account, perhaps, of the absence of Mr. Fox from the House, he was particularly industrious, I shall select a few brief specimens for the reader. On the question of the Grant to the Emperor of Germany, he said: —

"I do think, sir, Jacobin principles never existed much in this country; and, even admitting they had, I say they have been found so hostile to true liberty, that, in proportion as we love it, (and, whatever may be said, I must still consider liberty an inestimable blessing,) we must hate and detest these principles. But, more, — I do not think they even exist in France. They have there died the best of deaths; a death I am more pleased to see than if it had been effected by foreign force, — they have stung themselves to death, and died by their own poison."

The following is a concise and just summary of the causes and effects of the French Revolutionary War: —

"France, in the beginning of the Revolution, had conceived many romantic notions; she was to put an end to war, and produce, by a pure form of government, a perfectibility of mind which before had never been realised. The Monarchs of Europe, seeing the prevalence of these new principles, trembled for their thrones. France, also, perceiving the hostility of Kings to her projects,

CHAP. XVIII.

1800.

supposed she could not be a Republic without the overthrow of thrones. Such has been the regular progress of cause and effect; but who was the first aggressor, with whom the jealousy first arose need not now be a matter of discussion. Both the Republic and the Monarchs who opposed her acted on the same principles; — the latter said they must exterminate Jacobins, and the former that they must destroy Monarchs. From this source have all the calamities of Europe flowed; and it is now a waste of time and argument to inquire farther into the subject."

Adverting, in his Speech on the Negotiation with France, to the overtures that had been made for a Maritime Truce, he says, with that national feeling, which rendered him at this time so popular, —

" No consideration for our ally, no hope of advantage to be derived from joint negotiation, should have induced the English Government to think for a moment of interrupting the course of our naval triumphs. — This measure, sir, would have broken the heart of the navy, and would have damped all its future exertions. How would our gallant sailors have felt, when, chained to their decks like galley-slaves, they saw the enemy's vessels sailing under their bows in security, and proceeding, without a possibility of being molested, to revictual those places which had been so long blockaded by their astonishing skill, perseverance, and valour? We never stood more in need of their services, and their feelings at no time deserved to be more studiously consulted. The north of Europe presents to England a most awful and threat-

ening aspect. Without giving an opinion as to the origin of these hostile dispositions, or pronouncing decidedly whether they are wholly ill founded, I hesitate not to say, that if they have been excited because we have insisted upon enforcing the old established Maritime Law of Europe, — because we stood boldly forth in defence of indisputable privileges, — because we have refused to abandon the source of our prosperity, the pledge of our security, and the foundation of our naval greatness, — they ought to be disregarded or set at defiance. If we are threatened to be deprived of that which is the charter of our existence, which has procured us the commerce of the world, and been the means of spreading our glory over every land, — if the rights and honours of our flag are to be called in question, every risk should be run, and every danger braved. Then we should have a legitimate cause of war; — then the heart of every Briton would burn with indignation, and his hand be stretched forth in defence of his country. If our flag is to be insulted, let us nail it to the top-mast of the nation; there let it fly while we shed the last drop of our blood in protecting it, and let it be degraded only when the nation itself is overwhelmed."

He thus ridicules, in the same speech, the etiquette that had been observed in the selection of the ministers who were to confer with M. Otto: —

"This stiff-necked policy shows insincerity. I see Mr. Nepean and Mr. Hammond also appointed to confer with M. Otto, because they are of the same rank. Is not this as absurd as if Lord Whitworth were to be sent

CHAP. XVIII.

1801.

to Petersburgh, and told that he was not to treat but with some gentleman of six feet high, and as handsome as himself? Sir, I repeat that this is a stiff-necked policy, when the lives of thousands are at stake."

In the following year Mr. Pitt was succeeded, as Prime Minister, by Mr. Addington. The cause assigned for this unexpected change was the difference of opinion that existed between the King and Mr. Pitt, with respect to the further enfranchisement of the Catholics of Ireland. To this measure the Minister and some of his colleagues considered themselves to have been pledged by the Act of Union; but, on finding that they could not carry it, against the scruples of their Royal Master, resigned.

Though Mr. Pitt so far availed himself of this alleged motive of his abdication as to found on it rather an indecorous appeal to the Catholics, in which he courted popularity for himself at the expense of that of the King, it was suspected that he had other and less disinterested reasons for his conduct. While he made a merit, too, of thus resigning his supremacy, he well knew that he still commanded it with "a falconer's voice," and, whenever he pleased, "could lure the tassel-gentle back again." The facility with which he afterwards returned to power, without making any stipulation for the measure now held to be essential, proves either that the

motive now assigned for his resignation was false, or that, having sacrificed power to principle in 1801, he took revenge by making principle, in its turn, give way to power in 1804.

During the early part of the new Administration, Mr. Sheridan appears to have rested on his arms, — having spoken so rarely and briefly throughout the Session as not to have furnished to the collector of his speeches a single specimen of oratory worth recording. It is not till the discussion of the Definitive Treaty, in May, 1802, that he is represented as having professed himself friendly to the existing Ministry: — "Certainly," he said, "I have in several respects given my testimony in favour of the present Ministry, — in nothing more than for making the best peace, perhaps they could, after their predecessors had left them in such a deplorable situation." It was on this occasion, however, that in ridiculing the understanding supposed to exist between the Ex-minister and his successor, he left such marks of his wit on the latter as all his subsequent friendship could not efface. Among other remarks, full of humour, he said,—

"I should like to support the present Minister on fair ground; but what is he? a sort of *outside passenger*, — or rather a man leading the horses round a corner, while reins, whip, and all, are in the hands of the coachman on the *box!* (*looking at Mr. Pitt's elevated seat,*

three or four benches above that of the Treasury.) Why not have an union of the two Ministers, or, at least, some intelligible connection? When the Ex-minister quitted office, almost all the *subordinate* Ministers kept their places. How was it that the whole family did not move together? Had he only one *covered waggon* to carry *friends and goods?* or has he left directions behind him that they may know where to call? I remember a fable of *Aristophanes*'s, which is translated from Greek into decent English. — I mention this for the country gentlemen. It is of a man that sat so long on a seat (about as long, perhaps, as the Ex-minister did on the Treasury-bench,) that he grew to it. When Hercules pulled him off, he left all the sitting part of the man behind him. The House can make the allusion." *

* The following is another highly humorous passage from this speech: —

" But let France have colonies! Oh, yes! let her have a good trade, that she may be afraid of war, says the Learned Member, — that's the way to make Buonaparte love peace. He has had, to be sure, a sort of military education. He has been abroad, and is rather *rough company;* but if you put him behind the *counter* a little, he will mend exceedingly. When I was reading the Treaty, I thought all the names of foreign places, viz. Pondicherry, Chandenagore, Cochin, Martinico, &c. all *cessions*. Not they, — they are all so many *traps* and *holes* to catch this silly fellow in, and make a *merchant* of him! I really think the best way upon this principle would be this: — let the merchants of London open a *public subscription*, and set him up at once. I hear a great deal respecting a certain *statue* about to be erected to the Right Honourable Gentleman (Mr. Pitt) now in my eye, at a great expense. Send all that money over to the First Consul, and give him, what you talk of so much, *Capital*, to begin trade with. I hope the Right Honourable

We have here an instance, in addition to the many which I have remarked, of his adroitness, not only in laying claim to all *waifs* of wit, "*ubi non apparebat dominus*," but in stealing the wit himself wherever he could find it. This happy application of the fable of Hercules and Theseus to the Ministry had been first made by Gilbert Wakefield, in a Letter to Mr. Fox, which the latter read to Sheridan a few days before the Debate; and the only remark that Sheridan made, on hearing it, was, "What an odd pedantic fancy!" But the wit knew well the value of the jewel that the pedant had raked up, and lost no time in turning it to account, with all his accustomed skill. The Letter of Wakefield, in which the application of the fable occurs, has been omitted, I know not why, in his published Correspondence with Mr. Fox; but a Letter of Mr. Fox, in the same collection, thus alludes to it:—"Your story of Theseus is excellent, as applicable to our present rulers: if you could

---

Gentleman over the way will, like the First Consul, refuse a statue for the present, and postpone it as a work to posterity. There is no harm, however, in marking out the place. The Right Honourable Gentleman is musing, perhaps, on what square, or place, he will choose for its erection. I recommend the *Bank of England*. Now for the material. Not gold: no, no!—he has not left enough of it. I should, however, propose *papier mâché* and old bank-notes!"

CHAP. XVIII.

1802.

point out to me where I could find it, I should be much obliged to you. The Scholiast on Aristophanes is too wide a description." Mr. Wakefield, in answer, says, — " My Aristophanes, with the Scholia, is not here. If I am right in my recollection, the story probably occurs in the Scholia on the Frogs, and would soon be found by reference to the name of Theseus in Kuster's Index."

Another instance of this propensity in Sheridan, (which made him a sort of Cataline in wit, " covetous of another's wealth, and profuse of his own,") occurred during the preceding Session. As he was walking down to the House with Sir Philip Francis and another friend, on the day when the Address of Thanks on the Peace was moved, Sir Philip Francis pithily remarked, that " it was a Peace which every one would be glad of, but no one would be proud of." Sheridan, who was in a hurry to get to the House, did not appear to attend to the observation; — but, before he had been many minutes in his seat, he rose, and, in the course of a short speech (evidently made for the purpose of passing his stolen coin as soon as possible), said, " This, sir, is a peace which every one will be glad of, but no one can be proud of." *

* A similar theft was his observation, that " half the Debt of England had been incurred in pulling down the

The following letter from Dr. Parr to Sheridan, this year, records an instance of delicate kindness which renders it well worthy of preservation: —

"DEAR SIR,

"I believe that you and my old pupil Tom feel a lively interest in my happiness, and, therefore, I am eager to inform you, that, without any solicitation, and in the most handsome manner, Sir Francis Burdett has offered me the rectory of Graffham, in Huntingdonshire; that the yearly value of it now amounts to 200*l.*, and is capable of considerable improvement; that the preferment is tenable with my Northamptonshire rectory; that the situation is pleasant; and that, by making it my place of residence, I shall be nearer to my respectable scholar and friend, Edward Maltby, to the University of Cambridge, and to those Norfolk connections which I value most highly.

"I am not much skilled in ecclesiastical negotiations; and all my efforts to avail myself of the very obliging kindness conditionally intended for me by the Duke of Norfolk completely failed.

Bourbons, and the other half in setting them up" — which pointed remark he had heard, in conversation, from Sir Arthur Pigott.

CHAP. XVIII. 1802.

But the noble friendship of Sir Francis Burdett has set every thing right, I cannot refuse myself the great satisfaction of laying before you the concluding passage in Sir Francis's letter: —

" ' I acknowledge that a great additional motive with me to the offer I now make Dr. Parr, is, that I believe I cannot do any thing more pleasing to his friends, Mr. Fox, Mr. Sheridan, and Mr. Knight; and I desire you, sir, to consider yourself as obliged to them only.'

" You will readily conceive, that I was highly gratified with this striking and important passage, and that I wish for an early opportunity of communicating with yourself, and Mr. Fox, and Mr. Knight.

" I beg my best compliments to Mrs. Sheridan and Tom; and I have the honour to be, Dear Sir, your very faithful wellwisher, and respectful, obedient Servant, S. PARR.

" September 27. Buckden.

" Sir Francis sent his own servant to my house at Hilton with the letter; and my wife, on reading it, desired the servant to bring it to me at Buckden, near Huntingdon, where I yesterday received it."

It was about this time that the Primary Electors of the National Institute of France having proposed Haydn, the great composer, and Mr.

Sheridan, as candidates for the class of Literature and the Fine Arts, the Institute, with a choice not altogether indefensible, elected Haydn. Some French epigrams on this occurrence, which appeared in The Courier, seem to have suggested to Sheridan the idea of writing a few English *jeux-d'esprit* on the same subject, which were intended for the newspapers, but, I rather think, never appeared. These verses show that he was not a little piqued by the decision of the Institute; and the manner in which he avails himself of his anonymous character to speak of his own claims to the distinction, is, it must be owned, less remarkable for modesty than for truth. But Vanity, thus in masquerade, may be allowed some little license. The following is a specimen: —

> "The wise decision all admire;
> 'Twas just, beyond dispute —
> Sound taste! which, to Apollo's lyre
> Preferr'd — a German flute!"

Mr. Kemble, who had been for some time Manager of Drury Lane Theatre, was, in the course of the year 1800–1, tempted, notwithstanding the knowledge which his situation must have given him of the embarrassed state of the concern, to enter into negotiation with Sheridan for the purchase of a share in the property.

CHAP. XVIII.

1802.

How much anxiety the latter felt to secure such an associate in the establishment appears strongly from the following paper, drawn up by him, to accompany the documents submitted to Kemble during the negotiation, and containing some particulars of the property of Drury Lane, which will be found not uninteresting: —

"Outline of the Terms on which it is proposed that Mr. Kemble shall purchase a Quarter in the Property of Drury Lane Theatre.

"I really think there cannot be a negotiation, in matter of purchase and sale, so evidently for the advantage of both parties, if brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

"I am decided that the management of the theatre cannot be respected, or successful, but in the hands of an actual proprietor; and still the better, if he is himself in the profession, and at the head of it. I am desirous, therefore, that Mr. Kemble should be a proprietor and manager.

"Mr. Kemble is the person, of all others, who must naturally be desirous of both situations. He is at the head of his profession, without a rival; he is attached to it, and desirous of elevating its character. He may be assured of proper respect, &c. while I have the theatre; but I do not think he could brook his situation were the property to pass into vulgar and illiberal hands, — an event which he knows contingencies might produce. Laying aside, then, all affectation of indifference, so common in making bargains, let us set out with acknowledging that it is mutually our interest to agree, if we

can. At the same time, let it be avowed, that I must be considered as trying to get as good a price as I can, and Mr. Kemble to buy as cheap as he can. In parting with theatrical property there is no standard, or measure, to direct the price: the whole question is, what are the probable profits, and what is such a proportion of them worth?

"I bought of Mr. Garrick at the rate of 70,000*l.* for the whole theatre. I bought of Mr. Lacey at the rate of 94,000*l.* ditto. I bought of Dr. Ford at the rate o 86,000*l.* ditto. In all these cases there was a perishable patent, and an expiring lease, each having to run, at the different periods of the purchases, from ten to twenty years only.

"All these purchases have undoubtedly answered well; but in the chance of a Third Theatre consisted the risk; and the want of size and accommodation must have produced it, had the theatres continued as they were. But the *great* and *important feature* in the present property, and which is never for a moment to be lost sight of, is, that the Monopoly is, morally speaking, established for ever, at least as well as the Monarchy, Constitution, Public Funds, &c.,—as appears by No. 1., being the copy of 'The Final Arrangement' signed by the Lord Chamberlain, by authority of His Majesty, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Bedford, &c.; and the dormant patent of Covent Garden, that former terror of Drury Lane, is perpetually annexed to the latter. So that the value of Drury Lane at present, and in the former sales, is out of all comparison,—independently of the new building, superior size, raised prices, &c. &c. But the incumbrances on the theatre, whose annual charge must be paid before there can be any surplus profit, are much greater than in Mr. Garrick's time, or

on the old theatre afterwards. Undoubtedly they are, and very considerably, greater; but what is the proportion in the receipts? Mr. Garrick realised and left a fortune of 140,000*l.* (having lived, certainly, at no mean expense), acquired in —— years, on an average annual receipt of 25,000*l.* (qu. this?) Our receipts cannot be stated at less than 60,000*l.* per ann.; and it is demonstrable that preventing the most palpable frauds and abuses, with even a tolerable system of exertion in the management, must bring it, at the least, to 75,000*l.*; and this estimate does not include the advantages to be derived from the new tavern, passages, Chinese hall, &c.,—an aid to the receipt, respecting the amount of which I am very sanguine. What, then, is the probable profit, and what is a quarter of it worth? No. 3. is the amount of three seasons' receipts, the only ones on which an attempt at an average could be justifiable. No. 4. is the future estimate, on a system of exertion and good management. No. 5. the actual annual incumbrances. No. 6. the nightly expenses. No. 7. the estimated profits. Calculating on which, I demand, for a quarter of the property, * * * * * * *, reserving to myself the existing private boxes, but no more to be created, and the fruit-offices and houses not part of the theatre.

"I assume that Mr. Kemble and I agree as to the price, annexing the following conditions to our agreement: — Mr. Kemble shall have his engagement as an actor for any rational time he pleases. Mr. Kemble shall be manager, with a clear salary of 500 guineas per annum, and * * per cent. on the clear profits. Mr. Sheridan engages to procure from Messrs. Hammersleys a loan to Mr. Kemble of ten thousand pounds, part of the purchase-money, for four years, for which loan he is

content to become collateral security, and also to leave his other securities, now in their hands, in mortgage for the same. And for the payment of the rest of the money, Mr. Sheridan is ready to give Mr. Kemble every facility his circumstances will admit of. It is not to be overlooked, that if a private box is also made over to Mr. Kemble, for the whole term of the theatre lease, its value cannot be stated at less than 3500*l.* Indeed, it might at any time produce to Mr. Kemble, or his assigns, 300*l.* per annum. Vide No. 8. This is a material deduction from the purchase-money to be paid.

" Supposing all this arrangement made, I conceive Mr. Kemble's income would stand thus:—

	£	s.	d.
Salary as an actor, - -	1050	0	0
In lieu of benefit, - -	315	0	0
As manager, - - -	525	0	0
Per centage on clear profit, -	300	0	0
Dividend on quarter-share, -	*2500	0	0
	£4690	0	0

" I need not say how soon this would clear the whole of the purchase. With regard to the title, &c. Mr. Crews and Mr. Pigott are to decide. As to debts, the share must be made over to Mr. Kemble free from a claim even; and for this purpose all demands shall be called in, by public advertisement, to be sent to Mr. Kemble's own solicitor. In short, Mr. Crews shall be satisfied that there does not exist an unsatisfied demand on the theatre, or a possibility of Mr. Kemble being

* " I put this on the very lowest speculation."

CHAP. XVIII.

involved in the risk of a shilling. Mr. Hammersley, or such person as Mr. Kemble and Mr. Sheridan shall agree on, to be Treasurer, and receive an account for the whole receipts, pay the charges, trusts, &c.; and, at the close of the season, the surplus profits to the proprietors. A clause in case of death, or sale, to give the refusal to each other."

The following letter from Sheridan to Kemble, in answer, as it appears, to some complaint or remonstrance from the latter, in his capacity of Manager, is too curiously characteristic of the writer to be omitted: —

"DEAR KEMBLE,

"If I had not a real good opinion of your principles and intentions upon all subjects, and a very bad opinion of your nerves and philosophy upon some, I should take very ill indeed, the letter I received from you this evening.

"That the management of the theatre is a situation capable of becoming *troublesome* is information which I do not want, and a discovery which I thought you had made long since.

"I should be sorry to write to you gravely on your offer, because I must consider it as a nervous flight, which it would be as unfriendly in me to notice seriously as it would be in you seriously to have made it.

"What I *am* most serious in is a determination

that, while the theatre is indebted, and others, for it and for me, are so involved and pressed as they are, I will exert myself, and give every attention and judgment in my power to the establishment of its interests. In you I hoped, and do hope, to find an assistant, on principles of liberal and friendly confidence, — I mean confidence that should be above touchiness and reserve, and that should trust to me to estimate the value of that assistance.

"If there is any thing amiss in your mind not arising from the *troublesomeness* of your situation, it is childish and unmanly not to disclose it to me. The frankness with which I have always dealt towards you entitles me to expect that you should have done so.

"But I have no reason to believe this to be the case; and, attributing your letter to a disorder which I know ought not to be indulged, I prescribe that you shall keep your appointment at the Piazza Coffee-house, to-morrow at five, and, taking four bottles of claret instead of three, to which in sound health you might stint yourself, forget that you ever wrote the letter, as I shall that I ever received it.

"R. B. SHERIDAN."

CHAP. XIX.

STATE OF PARTIES. — OFFER OF A PLACE TO MR. T. SHERIDAN. — RECEIVERSHIP OF THE DUCHY OF CORNWALL BESTOWED UPON MR. SHERIDAN. — RETURN OF MR. PITT TO POWER. — CATHOLIC QUESTION. — ADMINISTRATION OF LORD GRENVILLE AND MR. FOX. — DEATH OF MR. FOX. — REPRESENTATION OF WESTMINSTER. — DISMISSION OF THE MINISTRY. — THEATRICAL NEGOTIATION. — SPANISH QUESTION. — LETTER TO THE PRINCE.

CHAP. XIX.

1802-3.

DURING the short interval of peace into which the country was now lulled, — like a ship becalmed for a moment in the valley between two vast waves, — such a change took place in the relative positions and bearings of the parties that had been so long arrayed against each other, and such new boundaries and divisions of opinion were formed, as considerably altered the map of the political world. While Mr. Pitt lent his sanction to the new Administration, they, who had made common cause with him in resigning, violently opposed it; and, while the Ministers were thus thwarted by those who had hitherto always agreed with them, they were supported by those Whigs with whom they had before most vehemently differed. Among this latter class of

their friends was, as I have already remarked, Mr. Sheridan, — who, convinced that the only chance of excluding Mr. Pitt from power lay in strengthening the hands of those who were in possession, not only gave them the aid of his own name and eloquence, but endeavoured to impress the same views upon Mr. Fox, and exerted his influence also to procure the sanction of Carlton-House in their favour.

It cannot, indeed, be doubted that Sheridan, at this time, though still the friend of Mr. Fox, had ceased, in a great degree, to be his follower. Their views with respect to the renewal of the war were wholly different. While Sheridan joined in the popular feeling against France, and showed his knowledge of that great instrument, the Public Mind, by approaching it only with such themes as suited the martial mood to which it was tuned, the too confiding spirit of Fox breathed nothing but forbearance and peace; — and he who, in 1786, had proclaimed the "natural enmity" of England and France, as an argument against their commercial intercourse, now asked, with the softened tone which time and retirement had taught him, "whether France was *for ever* to be considered our rival?" *

* Speech on the Address of Thanks, in 1803.

CHAP. XIX.

1802-3.

The following characteristic note, written by him, previously to the debate on the Army Estimates, (December 8, 1802,) shows a consciousness that the hold which he had once had upon his friend was loosened: —

"DEAR SHERIDAN,

"I mean to be in town for Monday, — that is, for the Army. As for to-morrow, it is no matter; I am *for* a largish fleet, though perhaps not quite so large as they mean. Pray, do not be absent Monday, and let me have a quarter of an hour's conversation before the business begins. Remember, I do not wish you to be inconsistent, at any rate. Pitt's opinion by Proxy is ridiculous beyond conception, and I hope you will show it in that light. I am very much against your abusing Bonaparte, because I am sure it is impolitic both for the country and ourselves. But, as you please; — only, for God's sake, Peace. *

"Yours ever,

"Tuesday night. C. J. Fox."

* These last words are a striking illustration of the line in Mr. Rogers's Verses on this statesman: —

"'Peace,' when he spoke, was ever on his tongue."

It was about this period that the writer of these pages had, for the first time, the gratification of meeting Mr. Sheridan, at Donington Park, the seat of the present Marquis of Hastings; — a circumstance which he recalls, not only with those lively impressions, that our first admiration of genius leaves behind, but with many other dreams of youth and hope, that still endear to him the mansion where that meeting took place, and among which gratitude to its Noble owner is the only one, perhaps, that has not faded. Mr. Sheridan, I remember, was just then furnishing a new house, and talked of a plan he had of levying contributions on his friends for a library. A set of books from each would, he calculated, amply accomplish it, and already the intimation of his design had begun to "breathe a soul into the silent walls." * The splendid and well-chosen library of Donington was, of course, not slow in furnishing its contingent; and little was it foreseen into what badges of penury these gifts of friendship would be converted at last.

As some acknowledgment of the services, which Sheridan had rendered to the Ministry, (though professedly as a tribute to his public character in general,) Lord St. Vincent, about this time, made an offer to his son, Mr. Thomas

* Rogers.

Sheridan, of the place of Registrar of the Vice-Admiralty Court of Malta, — an office which, during a period of war, is supposed to be of considerable emolument. The first impulse of Sheridan, when consulted on the proposal, was, as I have heard, not unfavourable to his son's acceptance of it. But, on considering the new position which he had, himself lately taken in politics, and the inference that might be drawn against the independence of his motives, if he submitted to an obligation which was but too liable to be interpreted, as less a return for past services than a *lien* upon him for future ones, he thought it safest for his character to sacrifice the advantage, and, desirable as was the provision for his son, obliged him to decline it.

The following passages of a letter to him from Mrs. Sheridan on this subject do the highest honour to her generosity, spirit, and good sense. They also confirm what has generally been understood, that the King, about this time, sent a most gracious message to Sheridan, expressive of the approbation with which he regarded his public conduct, and of the pleasure he should feel in conferring upon him some mark of his Royal favour: —

" I am more anxious than I can express about Tom's welfare. It is, indeed, unfortunate that

you have been obliged to refuse these things for him, but surely there could not be two opinions; yet why will you neglect to observe those attentions that honour does not compel you to refuse? Don't you know that when once the King takes offence, he was never known to forgive? I suppose it would be impossible to have your motives explained to him, because it would touch his weak side, yet any thing is better than his attributing your refusal to contempt and indifference. Would to God I could bear these necessary losses instead of Tom, particularly as I so entirely approve of your conduct."

"I trust you will be able to do something positive for Tom about money. I am willing to make any sacrifice in the world for that purpose, and to live in any way whatever. Whatever he has *now* ought to be certain, or how will he know how to regulate his expenses?"

The fate of young Sheridan was peculiarly tantalizing. Born and brought up in the midst of those bright hopes, which so long encircled his father's path, he saw them all die away as he became old enough to profit by them, leaving difficulty and disappointment, his only inheritance, behind. Unprovided with any profession by which he could secure his own independence, and shut out, as in this instance, from those

CHAP. XIX.

1803.

means of advancement, which it was feared, might compromise the independence of his father, he was made the victim even of the distinction of his situation, and paid dearly for the glory of being the son of Sheridan. In the expression of his face, he resembled much his beautiful mother, and derived from her also the fatal complaint of which he died. His popularity in society was unexampled, — but he knew how to attach as well as amuse; and though living chiefly with that class of persons, who pass over the surface of life, like Camilla over the corn, without leaving any impression of themselves behind, he had manly and intelligent qualities, that deserved a far better destiny. There are, indeed, few individuals, whose lives have been so gay and thoughtless, whom so many remember with cordiality and interest; and, among the numerous instances of discriminating good-nature, by which the private conduct of His Royal Highness the Duke of York is distinguished, there are none that do him more honour than his prompt and efficient kindness to the interesting family that the son of Sheridan has left behind him.

Soon after the declaration of War against France, when an immediate invasion was threatened by the enemy, the Heir Apparent, with the true spirit of an English Prince, came forward

to make an offer of his personal service to the country. A correspondence upon the subject, it is well known, ensued, in the course of which His Royal Highness addressed letters to Mr. Addington, to the Duke of York, and the King. It has been sometimes stated that these letters were from the pen of Mr. Sheridan; but the first of the series was written by Sir Robert Wilson, and the remainder by Lord Hutchinson.

The death of Joseph Richardson, which took place this year, was felt as strongly by Sheridan as any thing *can* be felt, by those who, in the whirl of worldly pursuits, revolve too rapidly round Self, to let any thing rest long upon their surface. With a fidelity to his old habits of unpunctuality, at which the shade of Richardson might have smiled, he arrived too late at Bagshot for the funeral of his friend, but succeeded in persuading the good-natured clergyman to perform the ceremony over again. Mr. John Taylor, a gentleman, whose love of good-fellowship and wit has made him the welcome associate of some of the brightest men of his day, was one of the assistants at this singular scene, and also joined in the party at the inn at Bedfont afterwards, where Sheridan, it is said, drained the "Cup of Memory" to his friend, till he found oblivion at the bottom.

At the close of the session of 1803, that strange diversity of opinions, into which the two leading parties were decomposed by the resignation of Mr. Pitt, had given way to new varieties, both of cohesion and separation, quite as little to be expected from the natural affinities of the ingredients concerned in them. Mr. Pitt, upon perceiving, in those to whom he had delegated his power, an inclination to surround themselves with such strength from the adverse ranks as would enable them to contest his resumption of the trust, had gradually withdrawn the sanction which he at first afforded them, and taken his station by the side of the other two parties in opposition, without, however, encumbering himself, in his views upon office, with either. By a similar movement, though upon different principles, Mr. Fox and the Whigs, who had begun by supporting the Ministry against the strong War-party of which Lord Grenville and Mr. Windham were the leaders, now entered into close co-operation with this new Opposition, and seemed inclined to forget both recent and ancient differences in a combined assault upon the tottering Administration of Mr. Addington.

The only parties, perhaps, that acted with consistency through these transactions, were Mr. Sheridan and the few who followed him on one side, and Lord Grenville and his friends on the

other. The support which the former had given to the Ministry, — from a conviction that such was the true policy of his party, — he persevered in, notwithstanding the suspicions it drew down upon him, to the last; while, to the last, he deprecated the connexion with the Grenvilles, as entangling his friends in the same sort of hollow partnership, out of which they had come bankrupts in character and confidence before.* In like manner, it must be owned, the Opposition, of which Lord Grenville was the head, held a course direct and undeviating from beginning to end. Unfettered by those reservations in favour of Addington, which so long embarrassed the movements of their former leader, they at once started in opposition to the Peace and the Ministry, and, with not only Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox, but the whole people of England against them, persevered till they had ranged all these several parties on their side: — nor was it altogether without reason that this party afterwards boasted that, if any abandonment of principle

* In a letter written this year by Mr. Thomas Sheridan to his father, there is the following passage: —

"I am glad you intend writing to Lord ——; he is *quite right* about politics, — reprobates the idea most strongly of any union with the Grenvilles, &c., which, he says, he sees is Fox's leaning. 'I agreed with your father perfectly on the subject, when I left him in town; but when I saw Charles at St. Ann's Hill, I perceived he was wrong and obstinate.'"

CHAP. XIX.

1804.

had occurred in the connexion between them and the Whigs, the surrender was assuredly not from their side.

Early in the year 1804, on the death of Lord Elliot, the office of Receiver of the Duchy of Cornwall, which had been held by that Nobleman, was bestowed by the Prince of Wales upon Mr. Sheridan, "as a trifling proof of that sincere friendship His Royal Highness had always professed and felt for him through a long series of years." His Royal Highness also added, in the same communication, the very cordial words, "I wish to God it was better worth your acceptance."

The following letter from Sheridan to Mr. Addington, communicating the intelligence of this appointment, shows pretty plainly the terms on which he not only now stood, but was well inclined to continue, with that Minister: —

"DEAR SIR, George Street, Tuesday evening.

"Convinced as I am of the sincerity of your good will towards me, I do not regard it as an impertinent intrusion to inform you that the Prince has, in the most gracious manner, and wholly unsolicited, been pleased to appoint me to the late Lord Elliot's situation in the Duchy of Cornwall. I feel a desire to communicate this to you myself, because I feel a confidence

that you will be glad of it. It has been my pride and pleasure to have exerted my humble efforts to serve the Prince without ever accepting the slightest obligation from him; but, in the present case, and under the present circumstances, I think it would have been really false pride and apparently mischievous affectation to have declined this mark of His Royal Highness's confidence and favour. I will not disguise that, at this peculiar crisis, I am greatly gratified at this event. Had it been the result of a mean and subservient devotion to the Prince's every wish and object, I could neither have respected the gift, the giver, or myself; but when I consider how recently it was my misfortune to find myself compelled by a sense of duty, stronger than my attachment to him, wholly to risk the situation I held in his confidence and favour, and that upon a subject * on which his feelings were so eager and irritable, I cannot but regard the increased attention, with which he has since honoured me, as a most gratifying demonstration that he has clearness of judgment and firmness of spirit to distinguish the real friends to his true glory and interests from the mean and merce-

* The offer made by the Prince of his personal services in 1803, — on which occasion Sheridan coincided with the views of Mr. Addington somewhat more than was agreeable to His Royal Highness.

CHAP. XIX. 1804.

nary sycophants, who fear and abhor that such friends should be near him. It is satisfactory to me, also, that this appointment gives me the title and opportunity of seeing the Prince, on trying occasions, openly and in the face of day, and puts aside the mask of mystery and concealment. I trust I need not add, that whatever small portion of fair influence I may at any time possess with the Prince, it shall be uniformly exerted to promote those feelings of duty and affection towards Their Majesties, which, though seemingly interrupted by adverse circumstances, I am sure are in his heart warm and unalterable—and, as far as I may presume, that general concord throughout his illustrious family, which must be looked to by every honest subject, as an essential part of the public strength at this momentous period. I have the honour to be, with great respect and esteem,

"Your obedient Servant,

"R. B. SHERIDAN.

"*Right Hon. Henry Addington.*"

The same views that influenced Mr. Sheridan, Lord Moira, and others, in supporting an Administration which, with all its defects, they considered preferable to a relapse into the hands of Mr. Pitt, had led Mr. Tierney, at the close of the last Session, to confer upon it a still more

efficient sanction, by enrolling himself in its ranks as Treasurer of the Navy. In the early part of the present year, another ornament of the Whig party, Mr. Erskine, was on the point of following in the same footsteps, by accepting, from Mr. Addington, the office of Attorney-General. He had, indeed, proceeded so far in his intention as to submit the overtures of the Minister to the consideration of the Prince, in a letter which was transmitted to His Royal Highness by Sheridan. The answer of the Prince, conveyed also through Sheridan, while it expressed the most friendly feelings towards Erskine, declined, at the same time, giving any opinion as to either his acceptance or refusal of the office of Attorney-General, if offered to him under the present circumstances. His Royal Highness also added the expression of his sincere regret, that a proposal of this nature should have been submitted to his consideration by one, of whose attachment and fidelity to himself he was well convinced, but who ought to have felt, from the line of conduct adopted and persevered in by His Royal Highness, that he was the very last person that should have been applied to for either his opinion or countenance respecting the political conduct or connexions of any public character,—especially of one so intimately connected with him, and belonging to his family.

CHAP. XIX.

1804.

If, at any time, Sheridan had entertained the idea of associating himself, by office, with the Ministry of Mr. Addington, (and proposals to this effect were, it is certain, made to him,) his knowledge of the existence of such feelings as prompted this answer to Mr. Erskine would, of course, have been sufficient to divert him from the intention.

The following document, which I have found, in his own hand-writing, and which was intended, apparently, for publication in the newspapers, contains some particulars with respect to the proceedings of his party at this time, which, coming from such a source, may be considered as authentic:—

"STATE OF PARTIES.

"Among the various rumours of Coalitions, or attempted Coalitions, we have already expressed our disbelief in that reported to have taken place between the Grenville-Windhamites and Mr. Fox. At least, if it was ever in negotiation, we have reason to think it received an early check, arising from a strong party of the *Old Opposition* protesting against it. The account of this transaction, as whispered in the political circles, is as follows:—

"In consequence of some of the most re-

spectable members of the Old Opposition being sounded on the subject, a meeting was held at Norfolk-House; when it was determined, with very few dissentient voices, to present a friendly remonstrance on the subject to Mr. Fox, stating the manifold reasons which obviously presented themselves against such a procedure, both as affecting Character and Party. It was urged that the present Ministers had, on the score of innovation on the constitution, given the Whigs no pretence for complaint whatever; and, as to their alleged incapacity, it remained to be proved that they were capable of committing errors and producing miscarriages, equal to those which had marked the councils of their predecessors, whom the measure in question was expressly calculated to replace in power. At such a momentous crisis, therefore, waving all considerations of past political provocation, to attempt, by the strength and combination of party, to expel the Ministers of His Majesty's choice, and to force into his closet those whom the Whigs ought to be the first to rejoice that He had excluded from it, was stated to be a proceeding which would assuredly revolt the public feeling, degrade the character of Parliament, and produce possibly incalculable mischief to the country.

"We understand that Mr. Fox's reply was, that he would never take any political step

CHAP. XIX.

1804.

against the wishes and advice of the majority of his old friends.

"The paper is said to have been drawn up by Mr. Erskine, and to have been presented to Mr. Fox by His Grace of Norfolk, on the day His Majesty was pronounced to be recovered from his first illness. Rumour places among the supporters of this measure the written authority of the Duke of Northumberland and the Earl of Moira, with the signatures of Messrs. Erskine, Sheridan, Shum, Curwen, Western, Brogden, and a long *et cætera*. It is said also that the Prince's sanction had been previously given to the Duke, — His Royal Highness deprecating all Party-struggle, at a moment when the defence of all that is dear to Britons ought to be the single sentiment that should fill the public mind.

"We do not vouch for the above being strictly accurate; but we are confident that it is not far from the truth."

The illness of the King, referred to in this paper, had been first publicly announced in the month of February, and was for some time considered of so serious a nature, that arrangements were actually in progress for the establishment of a Regency. Mr. Sheridan, who now formed a sort of connecting link between Carlton-House

and the Minister, took, of course, a leading part in the negotiations preparatory to such a measure. It appears, from a letter of Mr. Fox on the subject, that the Prince and another person, whom it is unnecessary to name, were at one moment not a little alarmed by a rumour of an intention to associate the Duke of York and the Queen in the Regency. Mr. Fox, however, begs of Sheridan to tranquillise their minds on this point: — the intentions (he adds) of "the Doctor *," though bad enough in all reason, do not go to such lengths; and a proposal of this nature, from any other quarter, could be easily defeated.

Within about two months from the date of the Remonstrance, which, according to a statement already given, was presented to Mr. Fox by his brother Whigs, one of the consequences which it prognosticated from the connexion of their party with the Grenvilles took place, in the re-

* To the infliction of this nickname on his friend, Mr. Addington, Sheridan was, in no small degree, accessory, by applying to those who disapproved of his administration, and yet gave no reasons for their disapprobation, the well-known lines, —

"I do not love thee, Doctor Fell,
And why, I cannot tell;
But this I know full well,
I do not love thee, Doctor Fell."

CHAP. XIX.

1804.

signation of Mr. Addington and the return of Mr. Pitt to power.

The confidence of Mr. Pitt, in thus taking upon himself, almost single-handed, the government of the country at such an awful crisis, was, he soon perceived, not shared by the public. A general expectation had prevailed that the three great Parties, which had lately been encamped together on the field of Opposition, would have each sent its Chiefs into the public councils, and thus formed such a Congress of power and talent as the difficulties of the empire, in that trying moment, demanded. This hope had been frustrated by the repugnance of the King to Mr. Fox, and the too ready facility with which Mr. Pitt had given way to it. Not only, indeed, in his undignified eagerness for office, did he sacrifice without stipulation the important question, which, but two years before, had been made the *sine quâ non* of his services, but, in yielding so readily to the Royal prejudices against his rival, he gave a sanction to that unconstitutional principle of exclusion *, which, if thus acted upon

* "This principle of personal exclusion (said Lord Grenville) is one of which I never can approve, because, independently of its operation to prevent Parliament and the people from enjoying the Administration they desired, and which it was their particular interest to have, it tends to establish a dangerous precedent, that would afford too much opportunity of private pique against the public interest. I,

by the party-feelings of the Monarch, would soon narrow the Throne into the mere nucleus of a favoured faction. In allowing, too, his friends and partisans to throw the whole blame of this exclusive Ministry on the King, he but repeated the indecorum of which he had been guilty in 1802. For, having at that time made use of the religious prejudices of the Monarch, as a pretext for his manner of quitting office, he now employed the political prejudices of the same personage, as an equally convenient excuse for his manner of returning to it.

A few extracts from the speech of Mr. Sheridan upon the Additional Force Bill, — the only occasion on which he seems to have spoken during the present year, — will show that the rarity of his displays was not owing to any failure of power, but rather, perhaps, to the increasing involvement of his circumstances, which left no time for the thought and preparation that all his public efforts required.

---

for one, therefore, refused to connect myself with any one argument that should sanction that principle; and, in my opinion, every man who accepted office under that Administration is, according to the letter and spirit of the Constitution, responsible for its character and construction, and the principle upon which it is founded."—*Speech of Lord Grenville on the motion of Lord Darnley for the repeal of the Additional Force Bill, Feb.* 15. 1805.

CHAP. XIX.

1805.

Mr. Pitt had, at the commencement of this year, condescended to call to his aid the co-operation of Mr. Addington, Lord Buckinghamshire, and other members of that Administration, which had withered away, but a few months before, under the blight of his sarcasm and scorn. In alluding to this Coalition, Sheridan says,—

"The Right Honourable Gentleman went into office alone; — but, lest the government should become too full of vigour from his support, he thought proper to beckon back some of the weakness of the former administration. He, I suppose, thought that the Ministry became, from his support, like spirits above proof, and required to be diluted; that, like gold refined to a certain degree, it would be unfit for use without a certain mixture of alloy; that the administration would be too brilliant, and dazzle the House, unless he called back a certain part of the mist and fog of the last administration to render it tolerable to the eye. As to the great change made in the Ministry by the introduction of the Right Honourable Gentleman himself, I would ask, does he imagine that he came back to office with the same estimation that he left it? I am sure he is much mistaken if he fancies that he did. The Right Honourable Gentleman retired from office because, as was stated, he could not carry an important question, which he deemed necessary to satisfy the just claims of the Catholics; and in going out he did not hesitate to tear off the sacred veil of Majesty, describing his Sovereign as the only person that stood in the way of this desirable object. After the Right Honourable Gentleman's retirement, he advised the Catholics to look to NO one but him for

the attainment of their rights, and cautiously to abstain from forming a connection with any other person. But how does it appear, now that the Right Honourable Gentleman is returned to office? He declines to perform his promise; and has received, as his colleagues in office, those who are pledged to resist the measure. Does not the Right Honourable Gentleman then feel that he comes back to office with a character degraded by the violation of a solemn pledge, given to a great and respectable body of the people, upon a particular and momentous occasion? Does the Right Honourable Gentleman imagine either that he returns to office with the same character for political wisdom, after the description which he gave of the talents and capacity of his predecessors, and after having shown by his own actions, that his description was totally unfounded?"

In alluding to Lord Melville's appointment to the Admiralty, he says, —

"But then, I am told, there is the First Lord of the Admiralty, — 'Do you forget the leader of the grand Catamaran project? Are you not aware of the important change in that department, and the advantage the country is likely to derive from that change?' Why, I answer, that I do not know of any peculiar qualifications the Noble Lord has to preside over the Admiralty; but I do know, that if I were to judge of him from the kind of capacity he evinced while Minister of War, I should entertain little hopes of him. If, however, the Right Honourable Gentleman should say to me, 'Where else would you put that Noble Lord, would you have him appointed War-Minister again?' I should say, Oh no, by no means, — I remember too well the expeditions to

CHAP. XIX.

1805.

Toulon, to Quiberon, to Corsica, and to Holland, the responsibility for each of which the Noble Lord took on himself, entirely releasing from any responsibility the Commander in Chief and the Secretary at War. I also remember that, which, although so glorious to our arms in the result, I still shall call a most unwarrantable project, — the expedition to Egypt. It may be said, that as the Noble Lord was so unfit for the military department, the naval was the proper place for him. Perhaps there were people who would adopt this whimsical reasoning. I remember a story told respecting Mr. Garrick, who was once applied to by an eccentric Scotchman, to introduce a production of his on the stage. This Scotchman was such a good-humoured fellow, that he was called 'Honest Johnny M'Cree.' Johnny wrote four acts of a tragedy, which he showed to Mr. Garrick, who dissuaded him from finishing it; telling him that his talent did not lie that way; so Johnny abandoned the tragedy, and set about writing a comedy. When this was finished, he showed it to Mr. Garrick, who found it to be still more exceptionable than the tragedy, and of course could not be persuaded to bring it forward on the stage. This surprised poor Johnny, and he remonstrated. 'Nay, now, David, (said Johnny,) did you not tell me that my talents did not lie in tragedy?' — 'Yes, (replied Garrick,) but I did not tell you that they lay in comedy.' — 'Then, (exclaimed Johnny,) gin they dinna lie there, where the de'il dittha lie, mon?' Unless the Noble Lord at the head of the Admiralty has the same reasoning in his mind as Johnny M'Cree, he cannot possibly suppose that his incapacity for the direction of the War-department necessarily qualifies him for the Presidency of the Naval. Perhaps, if the Noble Lord be told that he has no talents for the latter, His Lordship may exclaim with

honest Johnny M'Cree, 'Gin they dinna lie there, where the de'il dittha lie, mon?'"

On the 10th of May, the claims of the Roman Catholics of Ireland were, for the first time, brought under the notice of the Imperial Parliament, by Lord Grenville in the House of Lords, and by Mr. Fox in the House of Commons. A few days before the debate, as appears by the following remarkable letter, Mr. Sheridan was made the medium of a communication from Carlton-House, the object of which was to prevent Mr. Fox from presenting the Petition: —

"DEAR SHERIDAN,

"I did not receive your letter till last night.

"I did, on Thursday, consent to be the presenter of the Catholic Petition, at the request of the Delegates, and had further conversation on the subject with them at Lord Grenville's yesterday morning. Lord Grenville also consented to present the Petition to the House of Lords. — Now, therefore, any discussion on *this* part of the subject would be too late; but I will fairly own, that, if it were not, I could not be dissuaded from doing the public act, which, of all others, it will give me the greatest satisfaction and pride to perform. No past event in my political life ever did, and no future one ever can, give me such pleasure.

CHAP. XIX.

1805.

"I am sure you know how painful it would be to me to disobey any command of His Royal Highness's, or even to act in any manner that might be in the slightest degree contrary to his wishes, and, therefore, I am not sorry that your intimation came too late. — I shall endeavour to see the Prince to-day; but, if I should fail, pray take care that he knows how things stand before we meet at dinner, lest any conversation there should appear to come upon him by surprise.

"Yours ever,

"Arlington Street, Sunday. C. J. F."

It would be rash, without some further insight into the circumstances of this singular interference, to enter into any speculations with respect to its nature or motives, or to pronounce how far Mr. Sheridan was justified in being the instrument of it. But on the share of Mr. Fox, in the transaction, such suspension of opinion is unnecessary. We have here his simple and honest words before us, — and they breathe a spirit of sincerity from which even Princes might take a lesson with advantage.

Mr. Pitt was not long in discovering that Place does not always imply Power, and that, in separating himself from the other able men of the day, he had but created an Opposition as much too strong for the Government, as the Govern-

ment itself was too weak for the country. The humiliating resource to which he was driven, in trying, as a tonic, the reluctant alliance of Lord Sidmouth, — the abortiveness of his efforts to avert the fall of his old friend, Lord Melville, and the fatality of ill luck that still attended his exertions against France, — all concurred to render this reign of the once powerful Minister a series of humiliations, shifts, and disasters, unlike his former proud period in every thing, but ill success. The powerful Coalition opposed to him already had a prospect of carrying by storm the post which he occupied, when, by his death, it was surrendered, without parley, into their hands.

The Administration that succeeded, under the auspices of Lord Grenville and Mr. Fox, bore a resemblance to the celebrated Brass of Corinth, more, perhaps, in the variety of the metals brought together, than in the perfection of the compound that resulted from their fusion.* There were, comprised in it, not only the two great parties of the leading chiefs, but those Whigs who differed with them both under the

* See in the Annual Register of 1806 some able remarks upon Coalitions in general, as well as a temperate defence of this Coalition in particular, — for which that work is, I suspect, indebted to a hand such as has not often, since the time of Burke, enriched its pages.

CHAP. XIX.

1806.

Addington Ministry, and the Addingtons that differed with them all on the subject of the Catholic claims. With this last anomalous addition to the miscellany the influence of Sheridan is mainly chargeable. Having, for some time past, exerted all his powers of management to bring about a coalition between Carlton-House and Lord Sidmouth, he had been at length so successful, that, upon the formation of the present Ministry, it was the express desire of the Prince that Lord Sidmouth should constitute a part of it. To the same unlucky influence, too, is to be traced the very questionable measure (notwithstanding the great learning and ability with which it was defended) of introducing the Chief Justice, Lord Ellenborough, into the Cabinet.

As to Sheridan's own share in the arrangements, it was, no doubt, expected by him that he should now be included among the members of the Cabinet; and it is probable that Mr. Fox, at the head of a purely Whig ministry, would have so far considered the services of his ancient ally, and the popularity still attached to his name through the country, as to confer upon him this mark of distinction and confidence. But there were other interests to be consulted; — and the undisguised earnestness with which Sheridan had opposed the union of his party with the Gren-

villes, left him but little supererogation of services to expect in that quarter. Some of his nearest friends, and particularly Mrs. Sheridan, entreated, as I understand, in the most anxious manner, that he would not accept any such office as that of Treasurer of the Navy, for the responsibility and business of which they knew his habits so wholly unfitted him, — but that, if excluded by his colleagues from the distinction of a seat in the cabinet, he should decline all office whatsoever, and take his chance in a friendly independence of them. But the time was now past when he could afford to adopt this policy, — the emoluments of a place were too necessary to him to be rejected; — and, in accepting the same office that had been allotted to him in the Regency-arrangements of 1789, he must have felt, with no small degree of mortification, how stationary all his efforts, since then, had left him, and what a blank was thus made of all his services in the interval.

The period of this Ministry, connected with the name of Mr. Fox, though brief, and, in some respects, far from laudable, was distinguished by two measures, — the Plan of Limited Service, and the Resolution for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, — which will long be remembered to the honour of those concerned in them. The motion of Mr. Fox against the Slave-Trade was

CHAP. XIX.

1806.

the last he ever made in Parliament; and the same sort of melancholy admiration that Pliny expresses, in speaking of a beautiful picture, the painter of which had died in finishing it, — "*dolor manus, dum id ageret, abreptæ,*" — comes naturally over our hearts in thinking of the last, glorious work, to which this illustrious statesman, in dying, set his hand.

Though it is not true, as has been asserted, that Mr. Fox refused to see Sheridan in his last illness, it is but too certain that those appearances of alienation or reserve, which had been for some time past observable in the former, continued to throw a restraint over their intercourse with each other to the last. It is a proof, however, of the absence of any serious grounds for this distrust, that Sheridan was the person selected by the relatives of Mr. Fox to preside over and direct the arrangements of the funeral, and that he put the last solemn seal to their long intimacy, by following his friend, as mourner, to the grave.

The honour of representing the city of Westminster in Parliament had been, for some time, one of the dreams of Sheridan's ambition. It was suspected, indeed, — I know not with what justice, — that in advising Mr. Fox, as he is said to have done, about the year 1800, to secede from public life altogether, he was actuated by a

wish to succeed him in the representation of Westminster, and had even already set on foot some private negotiations towards that object. Whatever grounds there may have been for this suspicion, the strong wish that he felt on the subject had long been sufficiently known to his colleagues; and on the death of Mr. Fox, it appeared, not only to himself, but to the public, that he was the person naturally pointed out as most fit to be his parliamentary successor. It was, therefore, with no slight degree of disappointment he discovered, that the ascendancy of Aristocratic influence was, as usual, to prevail, and that the young son of the Duke of Northumberland would be supported by the Government in preference to him. It is but right, however, in justice to the Ministry, to state, that the neglect with which they appear to have treated him on this occasion, — particularly in not apprising him of their decision in favour of Lord Percy, sufficiently early to save him from the humiliation of a fruitless attempt, — is proved, by the following letters, to have originated in a double misapprehension, by which, while Sheridan, on one side, was led to believe that the Ministers would favour his pretensions, the Ministers, on the other, were induced to think that he had given up all intentions of being a candidate.

The first letter is addressed to the gentleman

CHAP. XIX.

1806.

(one of Sheridan's intimate friends) who seems to have been, unintentionally, the cause of the mistake on both sides.

" Somerset Place, September 14.

" DEAR ———,

" You must have seen by my manner, yesterday, how much I was surprised and hurt at learning, for the first time, that Lord Grenville had, many days previous to Mr. Fox's death, decided to support Lord Percy on the expected vacancy for Wesminster, and that you had since been the active agent in the canvass actually commenced. I do not like to think I have grounds to complain or change my opinion of any friend, without being very explicit, and opening my mind, without reserve, on such a subject. I must frankly declare, that I think you have brought yourself and me into a very unpleasant dilemma. You seemed to say, last night, that you had not been apprised of my intention to offer for Westminster on the apprehended vacancy. I am confident you have acted under that impression; but I must impute to you either great inattention to what fell from me in our last conversation on the subject, or great inaccuracy of recollection; for I solemnly protest I considered you as the individual most distinctly apprised, that at this moment to succeed that great

man and revered friend in Westminster, should the fatal event take place, would be the highest object of my ambition; — for, in that conversation I thanked you expressly for informing me that Lord Grenville had said to yourself, upon Lord Percy being suggested to him, that he, Lord Grenville, '*would decide on nothing until Mr. Sheridan had been spoken to, and his intentions known,*' or words precisely to that effect. I expressed my grateful sense of Lord Grenville's attention, and said, that it would confirm me in my intention of making no application, however hopeless myself respecting Mr. Fox, while life remained with him, — and these words of Lord Grenville you allowed last night to have been so stated to me, though not as a message from His Lordship. Since that time I think we have not happened to meet; at least, sure I am, we have had no conversation on the subject. Having the highest opinion of Lord Grenville's honour and sincerity, I must be confident that he must have had another impression made on his mind respecting my wishes before I was entirely passed by. I do not mean to say that my offering myself was immediately to entitle me to the support of Government, but I do mean to say, that my pretensions were entitled to consideration before that support was offered to another without the slightest notice taken of me, — the more espe-

CHAP. XIX.

1806.

cially as the words of Lord Grenville, reported by you to me, had been stated by me to many friends as my reliance and justification in not following their advice by making a direct application to Government. I pledged myself to them that Lord Grenville would not promise the support of Government till my intentions had been asked, and I quoted your authority for doing so: I never heard a syllable of that support being promised to Lord Percy until from you on the evening of Mr. Fox's death. Did I ever authorise you to inform Lord Grenville that I had abandoned the idea of offering myself? These are points which it is necessary, for the honour of all parties, should be amicably explained. I therefore propose, as the shortest way of effecting it, — wishing you not to consider this letter as in any degree confidential, — that my statements in this letter may be submitted to any two common friends, or to the Lord Chancellor alone, and let it be ascertained where the error has arisen, for error is all I complain of; and, with regard to Lord Grenville, I desire distinctly to say, that I feel myself indebted for the fairness and kindness of his intentions towards me. My disappointment of the protection of Government may be a sufficient excuse to the friends I am pledged to, should I retire: but I must have it understood whether or not I deceived them,

when I led them to expect that I should have that support.

"I hope to remain

"Ever yours sincerely,

"R. B. SHERIDAN.

"The sooner the reference I propose the better."

The second letter, which is still further explanatory of the misconception, was addressed by Sheridan to Lord Grenville: —

"MY DEAR LORD,

"Since I had the honour of Your Lordship's letter, I have received one from Mr. ———, in which, I am sorry to observe, he is silent as to my offer of meeting, in the presence of a third person, in order to ascertain whether *he* did or not so report a conversation with Your Lordship as to impress on my mind a belief that my pretensions would be considered, before the support of Government should be pledged elsewhere. Instead of this, he not only does not admit the *precise words* quoted by me, but does not state what he allows he did say. If he denies that he ever gave me reason to adopt the belief I have stated, be it so; but the only stipulation I have made is that we should come to an explicit understanding on this subject, — not with a view

CHAP. XIX. 1806.

to quoting words or repeating names, but that the misapprehension, whatever it was, may be so admitted as not to leave me under an unmerited degree of discredit and disgrace. Mr. ——— certainly never encouraged me to stand for Westminster, but, on the contrary, advised me to support Lord Percy, which made me the more mark at the time the fairness with which I thought he apprised me of the preference my pretensions were likely to receive in Your Lordship's consideration.

"Unquestionably Your Lordship's recollection of what passed between Mr. ——— and yourself must be just; and were it no more than what you said on the same subject to Lord Howick, I consider it as a mark of attention; but what has astonished me is, that Mr. ——— should ever have informed Your Lordship, as he admits he did, that I had no intention of offering myself. This naturally must have put from your mind whatever degree of disposition was there to have made a preferable application to me; and Lord Howick's answer to your question, on which I have ventured to make a friendly remonstrance, must have confirmed Mr. ———'s report. But allow me to suppose that I had myself seen your Lordship, and that you had explicitly promised me the support of Government, and had afterwards sent for me and informed

me that it was at all an object to you that I should give way to Lord Percy, I assure you, with the utmost sincerity, that I should cheerfully have withdrawn myself, and applied every interest I possessed as Your Lordship should have directed.

"All I request is, that what passed between me and Mr. ——— may take an intelligible shape before any common friend, or before Your Lordship. This I conceive to be a preliminary due to my own honour, and what he ought not to evade."

The Address which he delivered, at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, in declining the offer of support which many of the electors still pressed upon him, contains some of those touches of personal feeling which a biographer is more particularly bound to preserve. In speaking of Mr. Fox, he said, —

"It is true there have been occasions upon which I have differed with him — painful recollections of the most painful moments of my political life! Nor were there wanting those who endeavoured to represent these differences as a departure from the homage which his superior mind, though unclaimed by him, was entitled to, and from the allegiance of friendship which our hearts all swore to him. But never was the genuine and confiding texture of his soul more manifest than on such occasions: he knew that nothing on earth could detach

CHAP. XIX.

1806.

me from him; and he resented insinuations against the sincerity and integrity of a friend, which he would not have noticed had they been pointed against himself. With such a man to have battled in the cause of genuine liberty, — with such a man to have struggled against the inroads of oppression and corruption, — with such an example before me, to have to boast that I never in my life gave one vote in Parliament that was not on the side of freedom, is the congratulation that attends the retrospect of my public life. His friendship was the pride and honour of my days. I never, for one moment, regretted to share with him the difficulties, the calumnies, and sometimes even the dangers, that attended an honourable course. And now, reviewing my past political life, were the option possible that I should retread the path, I solemnly and deliberately declare that I would prefer to pursue the same course; to bear up under the same pressure; to abide by the same principles; and to remain by his side an exile from power, distinction, and emolument, rather than be at this moment a splendid example of successful servility or prosperous apostacy, though clothed with power, honour, titles, gorged with sinecures, and lord of hoards obtained from the plunder of the people."

At the conclusion of his Address he thus alludes, with evidently a deep feeling of discontent, to the circumstances that had obliged him to decline the honour now proposed to him: —

"Illiberal warnings have been held out, most unauthoritatively I know, that by persevering in the present contest I may risk my official situation; and if I retire,

I am aware that minds, as coarse and illiberal, may assign the dread of that as my motive. To such insinuations I shall scorn to make any other reply than a reference to the whole of my past political career. I consider it as no boast to say, that any one who has struggled through such a portion of life as I have, without obtaining an office, is not likely to abandon his principles to retain one when acquired. If riches do not give independence, the next best thing to being very rich is to have been used to be very poor. But independence is not allied to wealth, to birth, to rank, to power, to titles, or to honour. Independence is in the mind of a man, or it is no where. On this ground were I to decline the contest, I should scorn the imputation that should bring the purity of my purpose into doubt. No Minister can expect to find in me a servile vassal. No Minister can expect from me the abandonment of any principle I have avowed, or any pledge I have given. I know not that I have hitherto shrunk in place from opinions I have maintained while in opposition. Did there exist a Minister of a different cast from any I know in being, were he to attempt to exact from me a different conduct, my office should be at his service to-morrow. Such a Ministry might strip me of my situation, in some respects of considerable emolument, but he could not strip me of the proud conviction that I was right; he could not strip me of my own self-esteem; he could not strip me, I think, of some portion of the confidence and good opinion of the people. But I am noticing the calumnious threat I allude to more than it deserves. There can be no peril, I venture to assert, under the present Government, in the free exercise of discretion, such as belongs to the present question. I therefore disclaim the merit of putting any thing to hazard. If I have

CHAP. XIX.

1806.

missed the opportunity of obtaining all the support I might, perhaps, have had on the present occasion, from a very scrupulous delicacy, which I think became and was incumbent upon me, but which I by no means conceive to have been a fit rule for others, I cannot repent it. While the slightest aspiration of breath passed those lips, now closed for ever,—while one drop of life's blood beat in that heart, now cold for ever, — I could not, I ought not, to have acted otherwise than I did.—I now come with a very embarrassed feeling to that declaration which I yet think you must have expected from me, but which I make with reluctance, because, from the marked approbation I have experienced from you, I fear that with reluctance you will receive it, — I feel myself under the necessity of retiring from this contest."

About three weeks after ensued the Dissolution of Parliament, — a measure attended with considerable unpopularity to the Ministry, and originating as much in the enmity of one of its members to Lord Sidmouth, as the introduction of that Noble Lord among them, at all, was owing to the friendship of another. In consequence of this event, Lord Percy having declined offering himself again, Mr. Sheridan became a candidate for Westminster, and after a most riotous contest with a demagogue of the moment, named Paull, was, together with Sir Samuel Hood, declared duly elected.

The moderate measure in favour of the Roman Catholics, which the Ministry now thought it

due to the expectations of that body to bring forward, was, as might be expected, taken advantage of by the King to rid himself of their counsels, and produced one of those bursts of bigotry, by which the people of England have so often disgraced themselves. It is sometimes a misfortune to men of wit, that they put their opinions in a form to be remembered. We might, perhaps, have been ignorant of the keen, but worldly view which Mr. Sheridan, on this occasion, took of the hardihood of his colleagues, if he had not himself expressed it in a form so portable to the memory. "He had often," he said, "heard of people knocking out their brains against a wall, but never before knew of any one building a wall expressly for the purpose."

It must be owned, indeed, that, though far too sagacious and liberal not to be deeply impressed with the justice of the claims advanced by the Catholics, he was not altogether disposed to go those generous lengths in their favour, of which Mr. Fox and a few others of their less calculating friends were capable. It was his avowed opinion, that, though the measure, whenever brought forward, should be supported and enforced by the whole weight of the party, they ought never so far to identify or encumber themselves with it, as to make its adoption a *sine*

CHAP. XIX.

1807.

quâ non of their acceptance or retention of office. His support, too, of the Ministry of Mr. Addington, which was as virtually pledged against the Catholics as that which now succeeded to power, sufficiently shows the secondary station that this great question occupied in his mind; nor can such a deviation from the usual tone of his political feelings be otherwise accounted for, than by supposing that he was aware of the existence of a strong indisposition to the measure in that quarter, by whose views and wishes his public conduct was, in most cases, regulated.

On the general question, however, of the misgovernment of Ireland, and the disabilities of the Catholics, as forming its most prominent feature, his zeal was always forthcoming and ardent, — and never more so than during the present Session, when, on the question of the Irish Arms' Bill, and his own motion upon the State of Ireland, he distinguished himself by an animation and vigour worthy of the best period of his eloquence.

Mr. Grattan, in supporting the coercive measures now adopted against his country, had shown himself, for once, alarmed into a concurrence with the wretched system of governing by Insurrection Acts, and, for once, lent his sanction to the principle upon which all such measures are founded, namely, that of enabling

Power to defend itself against the consequences of its own tyranny and injustice. In alluding to some expressions used by this great man, Sheridan said: —

"He now happened to recollect what was said by a Right Honourable Gentleman, to whose opinions they all deferred (Mr. Grattan), that notwithstanding he voted for the present measure, with all its defects, rather than lose it altogether, yet that gentleman said, that he hoped to secure the reversionary interest of the Constitution to Ireland. But when we saw that the Constitution was suspended from the year 1796 to the present period, and that it was now likely to be continued for three years longer, the danger was that we might lose the interest altogether; — when we were mortgaged for such a length of time, at last a foreclosure might take place."

The following is an instance of that happy power of applying old stories, for which Mr. Windham, no less than Sheridan, was remarkable, and which, by promoting anecdote into the service of argument and wit, ennobles it, when trivial, and gives new youth to it when old: —

"When they and others complain of the discontents of the Irish, they never appear to consider the cause. When they express their surprise that the Irish are not contented, while, according to their observation, that people have so much reason to be happy, they betray a total ignorance of their actual circumstances. The fact is, that the tyranny practised upon the Irish has been

CHAP. XIX.

1807.

throughout unremitting. There has been no change but in the manner of inflicting it. They have had nothing but variety in oppression, extending to all ranks and degrees of a certain description of the people. If you would know what this varied oppression consisted in, I refer you to the Penal Statutes you have repealed, and to some of those which still exist. There you will see the high and the low equally subjected to the lash of persecution; and yet still some persons affect to be astonished at the discontents of the Irish. But with all my reluctance to introduce any thing ludicrous upon so serious an occasion, I cannot help referring to a little story which those very astonished persons call to my mind. It was with respect to an Irish drummer, who was employed to inflict punishment upon a soldier. When the boy struck high, the poor soldier exclaimed, 'Lower, bless you,' with which the boy complied. But soon after the soldier exclaimed, 'Higher, if you please.' But again he called out, 'A little lower;' upon which the accommodating boy addressed him, — 'Now, upon my conscience, I see you are a discontented man; for strike where I may there's no pleasing you.' Now your complaint of the discontents of the Irish appears to me quite as rational, while you continue to strike, only altering the place of attack."

Upon this speech, which may be considered as the *bouquet*, or last parting blaze of his eloquence, he appears to have bestowed considerable care and thought. The concluding sentences of the following passage, though in his very worst taste, were as anxiously laboured by him, and put through as many rehearsals on paper, as

any of the most highly finished witticisms in The School for Scandal: —

"I cannot think patiently of such petty squabbles, while Bonaparte is grasping the nations; while he is surrounding France, not with that iron frontier, for which the wish and childish ambition of Louis XIV. was so eager, but with kingdoms of his own creation; securing the gratitude of higher minds as the hostage, and the fears of others as pledges for his safety. His are no ordinary fortifications. His martello towers are Thrones; sceptres tipt with crowns are the palisadoes of his entrenchments, and Kings are his sentinels."

The Reporter here, by "tipping" the sceptres "with crowns," has improved, rather unnecessarily, upon the finery of the original. The following are specimens of the various trials of this passage, which I find scribbled over detached scraps of paper: —

"Contrast the different attitudes and occupations of the two governments: — B. eighteen months from his capital, — head-quarters in the villages, — neither Berlin or Warsaw, — dethroning and creating thrones, — the works he raises are monarchies, — sceptres his palisadoes, — thrones his martello towers."

"Commissioning kings, — erecting thrones, — martello towers, — Cambaceres count noses, — Austrians, fine dressed, like Pompey's troops."

"B. fences with sceptres, — his martello towers are thrones, — he alone is France."

CHAP. XIX.

1807.

Another Dissolution of Parliament having taken place this year, he again became a candidate for the city of Westminster. But, after a violent contest, during which he stood the coarse abuse of the mob with the utmost good humour and playfulness, the election ended in favour of Sir Francis Burdett and Lord Cochrane, and Sheridan was returned, with his friend Mr. Michael Angelo Taylor, for the borough of Ilchester.

In the autumn of 1807 he had conceived some idea of leasing the property of Drury Lane Theatre, and, with that view, had set on foot, through Mr. Michael Kelly, who was then in Ireland, a negotiation with Mr. Frederick Jones, the proprietor of the Dublin Theatre. In explaining his object to Mr. Kelly, in a letter dated August 30. 1807, he describes it as "a plan by which the property may be leased to those who have the skill and the industry to manage it as it should be for their own advantage, upon terms which would render any risk to them almost impossible; — the profit to them (he adds) would probably be beyond what I could now venture to state, and yet upon terms which would be much better for the real proprietors than any thing that can arise from the careless and ignorant manner in which the undertaking is now misconducted by those who, my son ex-

cepted, have no interest in its success, and who lose nothing by its failure."

The negotiation with Mr. Jones was continued into the following year; and, according to a draft of agreement, which this gentleman has been kind enough to show me, in Sheridan's hand-writing, it was intended that Mr. Jones should, on becoming proprietor of one-quarter share of the property, "undertake the management of the Theatre in conjunction with Mr. T. Sheridan, and be entitled to the same remuneration, namely, 1000*l.* per annum certain income, and a certain per-centage on the net profits arising from the office-receipts, as should be agreed upon," &c. &c.

The following memorandum of a bet, connected with this transaction, is of somewhat a higher class of wagers than the One Tun Tavern has often had the honour of recording among its archives: —

"One Tun, St. James's Market, May 26. 1808.

"In the presence of Messrs. G. Ponsonby, R. Power, and Mr. Becher *, Mr. Jones bets Mr. Sheridan five

* It is not without a deep feeling of melancholy that I transcribe this paper. Of three of my most valued friends, whose names are signed to it, — Becher, Ponsonby, and Power, — the last has, within a few short months, been snatched away, leaving behind him the recollection of as many gentle and manly virtues as ever concurred to give sweetness and strength to character.

CHAP. XIX.

1808.

hundred guineas that he, Mr. Sheridan, does not write, and produce under his name, a play of five acts, or a first piece of three, within the term of three years from the 15th of September next.—It is distinctly to be understood that this bet is not valid unless Mr. Jones becomes a partner in Drury Lane Theatre before the commencement of the ensuing season.

" Richard Power. R. B. SHERIDAN.
" George Ponsonby. FRED. EDW. JONES.
" W. W. Becher.

" N. B. W. W. Becher and Richard Power join, one fifty,—the other one hundred pounds in this bet.

" R. POWER."

The grand movement of Spain, in the year 1808, which led to consequences so important to the rest of Europe, though it has left herself as enslaved and priest-ridden as ever, was hailed by Sheridan with all that prompt and well-timed ardour, with which he alone, of all his party, knew how to meet such great occasions. Had his political associates but learned from his example thus to place themselves in advance of the procession of events, they would not have had the triumphal wheels pass by them, and over them, so frequently. Immediately on the arrival of the Deputies from Spain, he called the attention of the House to the affairs of that country; and his speech on the subject, though short and unstudied, had not only the merit of falling in with the popular feeling at the moment,

but, from the views which it pointed out through the bright opening now made by Spain, was every way calculated to be useful both at home and abroad.

"Let Spain," he said, "see that we are not inclined to stint the services we had it in our power to render her; that we were not actuated by the desire of any petty advantage to ourselves; but that our exertions were to be solely directed to the attainment of the grand and general object, the emancipation of the world. If the flame were once fairly caught, our success was certain. France would then find, that she had hitherto been contending only against principalities, powers, and authorities, but that she had now to contend against a people."

The death of Lord Lake this year removed those difficulties which had, ever since the appointment of Sheridan to the Receivership of the Duchy of Cornwall, stood in the way of his reaping the full advantages of that office. Previously to the departure of General Lake for India, the Prince had granted to him the reversion of this situation which was then filled by Lord Elliot. It was afterwards, however, discovered that, according to the terms of the Grant, the place could not be legally held or deputed by any one who had not been actually sworn into it before the Prince's Council. On the death of Lord Elliot, therefore, His Royal Highness thought himself authorised, as we have seen, in conferring

the appointment upon Mr. Sheridan. This step, however, was considered by the friends of General Lake as not only a breach of promise, but a violation of right; and it would seem, from one of the documents which I am about to give, that measures were even in train for enforcing the claim by law.

The first is a Letter on the subject from Sheridan to Colonel M'Mahon: —

"My dear M'Mahon, Thursday evening.

"I have thoroughly considered and reconsidered the subject we talked upon to-day. Nothing on earth shall make me risk the possibility of the Prince's goodness to me furnishing an opportunity for a single scurrilous fool's presuming to hint even that he had, in the slightest manner, departed from the slightest engagement. The Prince's right, in point of law and justice, on the present occasion to recall the appointment given, I hold to be incontestable; but, believe me, I am right in the proposition I took the liberty of submitting to His Royal Highness, and which (so far is he from wishing to hurt General Lake) he graciously approved. But understand me, — my meaning is to give up the emoluments of the situation to General Lake, holding the situation at the Prince's pleasure, and abiding by an arbitrated estimate of General Lake's claim, sup-

posing His Royal Highness had appointed him; in other words, to value his interest in the appointment as *if he had it*, and to pay him for it or resign to him.

"With the Prince's permission I should be glad to meet Mr. Warwick Lake, and I am confident that no two men of common sense and good intentions can fail, in ten minutes, to arrange it so as to meet the Prince's wishes, and not to leave the shadow of a pretence for envious malignity to whisper a word against his decision.

"Yours ever,

"R. B. SHERIDAN.

"I write in great haste — going to A——."

The other Paper that I shall give, as throwing light on the transaction, is a rough and unfinished sketch by Sheridan of a statement intended to be transmitted to General Lake, containing the particulars of both Grants, and the documents connected with them: —

"DEAR GENERAL,

"I am commanded by the Prince of Wales to transmit to you a correct Statement of a transaction in which your name is so much implicated, and in which his feelings have been greatly wounded from a quarter, I am com-

CHAP. XIX.

manded to say, whence he did not expect such conduct.

"As I am directed to communicate the particulars in the most authentic form, you will, I am sure, excuse on this occasion my not adopting the mode of a familiar letter.

"Authentic Statement respecting the Appointment by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to the Receivership of the Duchy of Cornwall, in the Year 1804, to be transmitted by His Royal Highness's Command to Lieutenant-General Lake, Commander-in-chief of the Forces in India.

"The circumstances attending the original reversionary Grant to General Lake are stated in the brief for Counsel on this occasion by Mr. Bignel, the Prince's solicitor, to be as follow: (No. I.) It was afterwards understood by the Prince that the service he had wished to render General Lake, by this Grant, had been defeated by the terms of it; and so clearly had it been shown that there were essential duties attached to the office, which no Deputy was competent to execute, and that a Deputy, even for the collection of the rents, could not be appointed but by a principal actually in possession of the office, (by having been sworn into it before his Coun-

cil,) that upon General Lake's appointment to the command in India, the Prince could have no conception that General Lake could have left the country under an impression or expectation that the Prince would appoint him, in case of a vacancy, to the place in question. Accordingly, His Royal Highness, on the very day he heard of the death of Lord Elliot, unsolicited, and of his own gracious suggestion, appointed Mr. Sheridan. Mr. Sheridan returned, the next day, in a letter to the Prince, such an answer and acknowledgment as might be expected from him; and, accordingly, directions were given to make out his patent. On the ensuing ——— His Royal Highness was greatly surprised at receiving the following letter from Mr. Warwick Lake. (No. II.)

" His Royal Highness immediately directed Mr. Sheridan to see Mr. W. Lake, and to state his situation, and how the office was circumstanced; and for further distinctness to make a minute in writing * * * *"

Such were the circumstances that had, at first, embarrassed his enjoyment of this office; but, on the death of Lord Lake, all difficulties were removed, and the appointment was confirmed to Sheridan for his life.

In order to afford some insight into the nature

CHAP. XIX.

1808–9.

of that friendship, which existed so long between the Heir Apparent and Sheridan, — though unable, of course, to produce any of the numerous letters, on the Royal side of the correspondence, that have been found among the papers in my possession, — I shall here give, from a rough copy in Sheridan's hand-writing, a letter which he addressed about this time to the Prince : —

" It is matter of surprise to myself, as well as of deep regret, that I should have incurred the appearance of ungrateful neglect and disrespect towards the person to whom I am most obliged on earth, to whom I feel the most ardent, dutiful, and affectionate attachment, and in whose service I would readily sacrifice my life. Yet so it is, and to nothing but a perverse combination of circumstances, which would form no excuse were I to recapitulate them, can I attribute a conduct so strange on my part; and from nothing but Your Royal Highness's kindness and benignity alone can I expect an indulgent allowance and oblivion of that conduct: nor could I even hope for this were I not conscious of the unabated and unalterable devotion towards Your Royal Highness which lives in my heart, and will ever continue to be its pride and boast.

" But I should ill deserve the indulgence I request did I not frankly state what has passed

in my mind, which, though it cannot justify, may, in some degree, extenuate what must have appeared so strange to Your Royal Highness, previous to Your Royal Highness having actually restored me to the office I had resigned.

"I was mortified and hurt in the keenest manner by having repeated to me from an authority which *I then trusted*, some expressions of Your Royal Highness respecting me, which it was impossible I could have deserved. Though I was most solemnly pledged never to reveal the source from which the communication came, I for some time intended to unburthen my mind to my sincere friend and Your Royal Highness's most attached and excellent servant, M'Mahon — but I suddenly discovered, beyond a doubt, that I had been grossly deceived, and that there had not existed the slightest foundation for the tale that had been imposed on me; and I do humbly ask Your Royal Highness's pardon for having for a moment credited a fiction suggested by mischief and malice. Yet, extraordinary as it must seem, I had so long, under this false impression, neglected the course which duty and gratitude required from me, that I felt an unaccountable shyness and reserve in repairing my error, and to this procrastination other unlucky circumstances contributed. One day when I had the honour of meeting Your Royal Highness on

CHAP. XIX.

1808–9.

horseback in Oxford Street, though your manner was as usual gracious and kind to me, you said that I had deserted you privately and *politically*. I had long before that been assured, though falsely I am convinced, that Your Royal Highness had promised to make a point that I should neither speak nor vote on Lord Wellesley's business. My view of this topic, and my knowledge of the delicate situation in which Your Royal Highness stood in respect to the Catholic question, though weak and inadequate motives I confess, yet encouraged the continuance of that reserve which my original error had commenced. These subjects being passed by,—and sure I am Your Royal Highness would never deliberately ask me to adopt a course of debasing inconsistency,—it was my hope fully and frankly to have explained myself and repaired my fault, when I was informed that a circumstance that happened at Burlington-House, and which must have been heinously misrepresented, had greatly offended you; and soon after it was stated to me, by an authority which I have no objection to disclose, that Your Royal Highness had quoted, with marked disapprobation, words supposed to have been spoken by me on the Spanish question, and of which words, as there is a God in heaven, I never uttered one syllable.

"Most justly may Your Royal Highness answer to all this, why have I not sooner stated these circumstances, and confided in that uniform friendship and protection which I have so long experienced at your hands? I can only plead a nervous, procrastinating nature, abetted, perhaps, by sensations of, I trust, no false pride, which, however I may blame myself, impel me involuntarily to fly from the risk of even a cold look from the quarter to which I owe so much, and by whom to be esteemed is the glory and consolation of my private and public life.

"One point only remains for me to intrude upon Your Royal Highness's consideration, but it is of a nature fit only for personal communication. I therefore conclude, with again entreating Your Royal Highness to continue and extend the indulgence which the imperfections in my character have so often received from you, and yet be assured that there never did exist to Monarch, Prince, or man, a firmer or purer attachment than I feel, and to my death shall feel, to you, my gracious Prince and Master."

CHAP. XX.

DESTRUCTION OF THE THEATRE OF DRURY LANE BY FIRE. — MR. WHITBREAD. — PLAN FOR A THIRD THEATRE. — ILLNESS OF THE KING. — REGENCY. — LORD GREY AND LORD GRENVILLE. — CONDUCT OF MR. SHERIDAN. — HIS VINDICATION OF HIMSELF.

CHAP. XX.

1809.

With the details of the embarrassments of Drury Lane Theatre, I have endeavoured, as little as possible, to encumber the attention of the reader. This part of my subject would, indeed, require a volume to itself. The successive partnerships entered into with Mr. Grubb and Mr. Richardson, — the different Trust-deeds for the general and individual property, — the various creations of Shares, — the controversies between the Trustees and Proprietors as to the obligations of the Deed of 1793, which ended in a Chancery-suit in 1799, — the perpetual entanglements of the property which Sheridan's private debts occasioned, and which even the friendship and skill of Mr. Adam were wearied out in endeavouring to rectify, — all this would lead to such a mass of details and cor-

responderice as, though I have waded through it myself, it is by no means necessary to inflict upon others.

The great source of the involvements, both of Sheridan himself and of the concern, is to be found in the enormous excess of the expense of rebuilding the Theatre in 1793, over the amount stated by the architect in his estimate. This amount was 75,000*l.*; and the sum of 150,000*l.*, then raised by subscription, would, it was calculated, in addition to defraying this charge, pay off also the mortgage-debts with which the Theatre was encumbered. It was soon found, however, that the expense of building the House alone would exceed the whole amount raised by subscription; and, notwithstanding the advance of a considerable sum beyond the estimate, the Theatre was delivered in a very unfinished state into the hands of the proprietors, — only part of the mortgage-debts was paid off, and, altogether, a debt of 70,000*l.* was left upon the property. This debt Mr. Sheridan and the other proprietors took, voluntarily, and, as it has been thought, inconsiderately, upon themselves, — the builders, by their contracts, having no legal claim upon them, — and the payment of it being at various times enforced, not only against the Theatre, but against the private property of Mr. Sheridan,

CHAP. XX.

1809.

involved both in a degree of embarrassment from which there appeared no hope of extricating them.

Such was the state of this luckless property, — and it would have been difficult to imagine any change for the worse that could befall it, — when, early in the present year, an event occurred, that seemed to fill up at once the measure of its ruin. On the night of the 24th of February, while the House of Commons was occupied with Mr. Ponsonby's motion on the Conduct of the War in Spain, and Mr. Sheridan was in attendance, with the intention, no doubt, of speaking, the House was suddenly illuminated by a blaze of light; and, the Debate being interrupted, it was ascertained that the Theatre of Drury Lane was on fire. A motion was made to adjourn; but Mr. Sheridan said, with much calmness, that, "whatever might be the extent of the private calamity, he hoped it would not interfere with the public business of the country." He then left the House; and, proceeding to Drury Lane, witnessed, with a fortitude which strongly interested all who observed him, the entire destruction of his property.*

* It is said that, as he sat at the Piazza Coffee-house, during the fire, taking some refreshment, a friend of his having remarked on the philosophic calmness with which he bore his misfortune, Sheridan answered, "A man may surely be allowed to take a glass of wine *by his own fire-side.*"

Among his losses on the occasion there was one which, from being associated with feelings of other times, may have affected him, perhaps, more deeply than many that were far more serious. A harpsichord that had belonged to his first wife, and had long survived her sweet voice in silent widowhood, was, with other articles of furniture that had been moved from Somerset-House to the Theatre, lost in the flames.

The ruin thus brought upon this immense property seemed, for a time, beyond all hope of retrieval. The embarrassments of the concern were known to have been so great, and such a swarm of litigious claims lay slumbering under those ashes, that it is not surprising the public should have been slow and unwilling to touch them. Nothing, indeed, short of the intrepid zeal of Mr. Whitbread could have ventured upon the task of remedying so complex a calamity; nor could any industry less persevering have compassed the miracle of rebuilding and re-animating that edifice, among the many-tongued claims that beset and perplexed his enterprise.

Without vouching for the authenticity or novelty of this anecdote, (which may have been, for aught I know, like the wandering Jew, a regular attendant upon all fires, since the time of Hierocles,) I give it as I heard it.

CHAP. XX.

1809.

In the following interesting letter to him from Sheridan, we trace the first steps of his friendly interference on the occasion : —

" My dear Whitbread,

" Procrastination is always the consequence of an indolent man's resolving to write a long detailed letter, upon any subject, however important to himself, or whatever may be the confidence he has in the friend he proposes to write to. To this must be attributed your having escaped the statement I threatened you with in my last letter, and the brevity with which I now propose to call your attention to the serious, and, to me, most important request, contained in this, — reserving all I meant to have written for personal communication.

" I pay you no compliment when I say that, without comparison, you are the man living, in my estimation, the most disposed and the most competent to bestow a portion of your time and ability to assist the call of friendship, — on the condition that that call shall be proved to be made in a cause just and honourable, and in every respect entitled to your protection.

" On this ground alone I make my application to you. You said, some time since, in my house, but in a careless conversation only, that you would be a Member of a Committee for rebuild-

ing Drury Lane Theatre, if it would serve me; and, indeed, you very kindly suggested, yourself, that there were more persons disposed to assist that object than I might be aware of. I most thankfully accept the offer of your interference, and am convinced of the benefits your friendly exertions are competent to produce. I have worked the whole subject in my own mind, and see a clear way to retrieve a great property, at least to my son and his family, if my plan meets the support I hope it will appear to merit.

"Writing thus to you in the sincerity of private friendship, and the reliance I place on my opinion of your character, I need not ask of you, though eager and active in politics as you are, not to be severe in criticising my palpable neglect of all parliamentary duty. It would not be easy to explain to you, or even to make you comprehend, or any one in prosperous and affluent plight, the private difficulties I have to struggle with. My mind, and the resolute independence belonging to it, has not been in the least subdued by the late calamity; but the consequences arising from it have more engaged and embarrassed me than, perhaps, I have been willing to allow. It has been a principle of my life, persevered in through great difficulties, never to borrow money of a private friend; and this

CHAP. XX.

1809.

resolution I would starve rather than violate. Of course, I except the political aid of election-subscription. When I ask you to take a part in the settlement of my shattered affairs, I ask you only to do so after a previous investigation of every part of the past circumstances which relate to the trust I wish you to accept, in conjunction with those who wish to serve me, and to whom I think you could not object. I may be again seized with an illness as alarming as that I lately experienced. Assist me in relieving my mind from the greatest affliction that such a situation can again produce, — the fear of others suffering by my death.

"To effect this little more is necessary than some resolution on my part, and the active superintending advice of a mind like yours.

"Thus far on paper: I will see you next ——, and therefore will not trouble you for a written reply."

Encouraged by the opening which the destruction of Drury Lane seemed to offer to free adventure in theatrical property, a project was set on foot for the establishment of a Third Great Theatre, which, being backed by much of the influence and wealth of the city of London, for some time threatened destruction to the monopoly that had existed so long. But, by the

exertions of Mr. Sheridan and his friends, this scheme was defeated, and a bill for the erection of Drury Lane Theatre by subscription, and for the incorporation of the Subscribers, was passed through Parliament.

That Mr. Sheridan himelf would have had no objection to a Third Theatre, if held by a Joint Grant to the Proprietors of the other two, appears not only from his speeches and petitions on the subject at this time, but from the following Plan for such an establishment, drawn up by him, some years before, and intended to be submitted to the consideration of the Proprietors of both Houses: —

" GENTLEMEN,

" According to your desire, the plan of the proposed *Assistant Theatre* is here explained in writing for your further consideration.

" From our situations in the Theatres Royal of Drury Lane and Covent Garden we have had opportunities of observing many circumstances relative to our general property, which must have escaped those who do not materially interfere in the management of that property. One point in particular has lately weighed extremely in our opinions, which is, *an apprehension of a new Theatre being erected for some species or other of dramatic entertainment.* Were this event to take place on an opposing interest, our property would sink in value one half, and, in all probability, the contest that would ensue would speedily end in the absolute ruin of one of the

present established Theatres. We have reason, it is true, from His Majesty's gracious patronage to the present Houses, to hope, that a Third Patent for a winter Theatre is not *easily* to be obtained; but the motives which appear to call for one are so many, (and those of such a nature, as to increase every day,) that we cannot, on the maturest consideration of the subject, divest ourselves of the dread that such an event may not be very remote. With this apprehension before us, we have naturally fallen into a joint consideration of the means of preventing so fatal a blow to the present Theatres, or of deriving a general advantage from a circumstance which might otherwise be our ruin.

" Some of the leading motives for the establishment of a Third Theatre are as follows: —

" 1st. The great extent of the town and increased residence of a higher class of people, who, on account of many circumstances, seldom frequent the Theatre.

" 2d. The distant situation of the Theatres from the politer streets, and the difficulty with which ladies reach their carriages or chairs.

" 3d. The small number of side-boxes, where only, by the uncontroulable influence of fashion, ladies of any rank can be induced to sit.

" 4th. The earliness of the hour, which renders it absolutely impossible for those who attend on Parliament, live at any distance, or, indeed, for any person who dines at the prevailing hour, to reach the Theatre before the performance is half over.

" These considerations have lately been strongly urged to me by many leading persons of rank. There has also prevailed, as appears by the number of private plays at gentlemen's seats, an unusual fashion for theatrical entertainments among the politer class of people; and

it is not to be wondered at that they, feeling themselves, (from the causes above enumerated,) in a manner, excluded from our Theatres, should persevere in an endeavour to establish some plan of similar entertainment, on principles of superior elegance and accommodation.

" In proof of this disposition, and the effects to be apprehended from it, we need but instance one fact, among many, which might be produced, and that is the well-known circumstance of a subscription having actually been begun last winter, with very powerful patronage, for the importation of a French company of comedians, — a scheme which, though it might not have answered to the undertaking, would certainly have been the foundation of other entertainments, whose opposition we should speedily have experienced. The question, then, upon a full view of our situation, appears to be, whether the Proprietors of the present Theatres will contentedly wait till some other person takes advantage of the prevailing wish for a Third Theatre, or, having the remedy in their power, profit by a turn of fashion which they cannot controul.

" A full conviction that the latter is the only line of conduct which can give security to the Patents of Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatres, and yield a probability of future advantage in the exercise of them, has prompted us to endeavour at modelling this plan, on which we conceive those Theatres may unite in the support of a Third, to the general and mutual advantage of all the Proprietors.

" Proposals.

" The Proprietors of the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden appear to be possessed of two Patents, for the

privilege of acting plays, &c., under one of which the above-mentioned Theatre is opened, — the other lying dormant and useless; — it is proposed that this dormant Patent shall be exercised, (with His Majesty's approbation,) in order to license the dramatic performance of the new Theatre to be erected.

" It is proposed that the performances of this new Theatre shall be supported from the united establishments of the two present Theatres, so that the unemployed part of each company may exert themselves for the advantage of the whole.

" As the object of this *Assistant Theatre* will be to reimburse the Proprietors of the other two, at the full season, for the expensive establishment they are obliged to maintain when the town is almost empty, it is proposed, that the scheme of business to be adopted in the new Theatre shall differ as much as possible from that of the other two, and that the performances at the new house shall be exhibited at a superior price, and shall commence at a later hour.

" The Proposers will undertake to provide a Theatre for the purpose, in a proper situation, and on the following terms: — If they engage a Theatre to be built, being the property of the builder or builders, it must be for an agreed on rent, with security for a term of years. In this case the Proprietors of the two present Theatres shall jointly and severally engage in the whole of the risk; and the Proposers are ready, on equitable terms, to undertake the management of it. But, if the Proposers find themselves enabled, either on their own credit, or by the assistance of their friends, or on a plan of subscription, the mode being devised, and the security given by themselves, to become the builders of the Theatre, the interest in the building will, in that case, be

the property of the Proposers, and they will undertake to demand no rent for the performances therein to be exhibited for the mutual advantage of the two present Theatres.

"The Proposers will, in this case, conducting the business, under the dormant Patent above mentioned, bind themselves, that no theatrical entertainments, as plays, farces, pantomimes, or English operas, shall at any time be exhibited in this Theatre but for the general advantage of the Proprietors of the other two Theatres; the Proposers reserving to themselves any profit they can make of the building, converted to purposes distinct from the business of the Theatres.

"The Proposers, undertaking the management of the new Theatre, shall be entitled to a sum to be settled by the Proprietors at large, or by an equitable arbitration.

"It is proposed, that all the Proprietors of the two present Theatres Royal of Drury Lane and Covent Garden shall share all profits from the dramatic entertainments exhibited at the new Theatre; that is, each shall be entitled to receive a dividend in proportion to the shares he or she possesses of the present Theatres; first only deducting a certain nightly sum to be paid to the Proprietors of Covent Garden Theatre, as a consideration for the licence furnished by the exercise of their present dormant Patent.

"'Fore Heaven! the Plan's a good Plan! I shall add a little Epilogue to-morrow.

"R. B. S.

"'Tis now too late, and I've a letter to write
Before I go to bed,—and then, Good Night."

CHAP. XX.

1809.

In the month of July, this year, the Installation of Lord Grenville, as Chancellor of Oxford, took place, and Mr. Sheridan was among the distinguished persons that attended the ceremony. As a number of honorary degrees were to be conferred on the occasion, it was expected, as a matter of course, that his name would be among those selected for that distinction; and, to the honour of the University, it was the general wish among its leading members that such a tribute should be paid to his high political character. On the proposal of his name, however, (in a private meeting, I believe, held previously to the Convocation,) the words "*Non placet*" were heard from two Masters, — one of whom, it is said, had no nobler motive for his opposition than that Sheridan did not pay his father's tithes very regularly. Several efforts were made to win over these dissentients; and the Reverend Mr. Ingram delivered an able and liberal Latin speech, in which he indignantly represented the shame that it would bring on the University, if such a name as that of Sheridan should be "*clam subductum*" from the list. The two Masters, however, were immovable; and nothing remained but to give Sheridan intimation of their intended opposition, so as to enable him to decline the honour of having his name proposed. On his appearance, afterwards, in the Theatre, a

burst of acclamation broke forth, with a general cry of "Mr. Sheridan among the Doctors, — Sheridan among the Doctors;" in compliance with which he was passed to the seat occupied by the Honorary Graduates, and sat, in unrobed distinction, among them, during the whole of the ceremonial. Few occurrences, of a public nature, ever gave him more pleasure than this reception.

At the close of the year 1810, the malady, with which the King had been thrice before afflicted, returned; and, after the usual adjournments of Parliament, it was found necessary to establish a Regency. On the question of the second adjournment, Mr. Sheridan took a line directly opposed to that of his party, and voted with the majority. That in this step he did not act from any previous concert with the Prince appears from the following letter, addressed by him to His Royal Highness on the subject, and containing particulars which will prepare the mind of the reader to judge more clearly of the events that followed: —

"Sir,

"I felt infinite satisfaction when I was apprised that Your Royal Highness had been far from disapproving the line of conduct I had presumed to pursue, on the last question of adjournment in the House of Commons. Indeed, I never

CHAP. XX.

1811.

had a moment's doubt but that Your Royal Highness would give me credit that I was actuated on that, as I shall on every other occasion through my existence, by no possible motive but the most sincere and unmixed desire to look to Your Royal Highness's honour and true interest, as the objects of my political life, — directed, as I am sure your efforts will ever be, to the essential interests of the Country and the Constitution. To this line of conduct I am prompted by every motive of personal gratitude, and confirmed by every opportunity, which peculiar circumstances and long experience have afforded me, of judging of your heart and understanding, — to the superior excellence of which, (beyond all, I believe, that ever stood in your rank and high relation to society,) I fear not to advance my humble testimony, because I scruple not to say for myself, that I am no flatterer, and that I never found that to *become* one was the road to your real regard.

" I state thus much because it has been under the influence of these feelings that I have not felt myself warranted (without any previous communication with Your Royal Highness) to follow implicitly the dictates of others, in whom, however they may be my superiors in many qualities, I can subscribe to no superiority as to devoted attachment and duteous affection to

Your Royal Highness, or in that practical knowledge of the public mind and character, upon which alone must be built that popular and personal estimation of Your Royal Highness, so necessary to your future happiness and glory, and to the prosperity of the nation you are destined to rule over.

" On these grounds, I saw no policy or consistency in unnecessarily giving a general sanction to the examination of the physicians before the Council, and then attempting, on the question of adjournment, to hold that examination as nought. On these grounds, I have ventured to doubt the wisdom or propriety of any endeavour (if any such endeavour has been made) to induce Your Royal Highness, during so critical a moment, to stir an inch from the strong reserved post you had chosen, or give the slightest public demonstration of any future intended political preference ; — convinced as I was that the rule of conduct you had prescribed to yourself was precisely that which was gaining you the general heart, and rendering it impracticable for any quarter to succeed in annexing unworthy conditions to that most difficult situation, which you were probably so soon to be called on to accept.

" I may, Sir, have been guilty of error of judgment in both these respects, differing, as I

CHAP. XX. 1811.

fear I have done, from those whom I am bound so highly to respect; but, at the same time, I deem it no presumption to say that, until better instructed, I feel a strong confidence in the justness of my own view of the subject; and simply because of *this* — I am sure that the decisions of that judgment, be they sound or mistaken, have not, at least, been rashly taken up, but were founded on deliberate zeal for your service and glory, unmixed, I will confidently say, with any one selfish object or political purpose of my own."

The same limitations and restrictions that Mr. Pitt proposed in 1789, were, upon the same principles, adopted by the present Minister: nor did the Opposition differ otherwise from their former line of argument, than by omitting altogether that claim of Right for the Prince, which Mr. Fox had, in the proceedings of 1789, asserted. The event that ensued is sufficiently well known. To the surprise of the public, (who expected, perhaps, rather than wished, that the Coalesced Party, of which Lord Grey and Lord Grenville were the chiefs, should now succeed to power,) Mr. Perceval and his colleagues were informed by the Regent that it was the intention of His Royal Highness to continue them still in office.

The share taken by Mr. Sheridan in the transactions that led to this decision, is one of those passages of his political life upon which the criticism of his own party has been most severely exercised, and into the details of which I feel most difficulty in entering: because, however curious it may be to penetrate into these "*post-scenia*" of public life, it seems hardly delicate, while so many of the chief actors are still upon the stage. As there exists, however, a Paper drawn up by Mr. Sheridan, containing what he considered a satisfactory defence of his conduct on this occasion, I should ill discharge my duty towards his memory, were I, from any scruples or predilections of my own, to deprive him of the advantage of a statement, on which he appears to have relied so confidently for his vindication.

But, first, — in order fully to understand the whole course of feelings and circumstances, by which not only Sheridan, but his Royal Master, (for their cause is, in a great degree, identified,) were, for some time past, predisposed towards the line of conduct which they now pursued, — it will be necessary to recur to a few antecedent events.

By the death of Mr. Fox the chief *personal* tie that connected the Heir Apparent with the party of that statesman was broken. The *poli-*

CHAP. XX.

1811.

tical identity of the party itself had, even before that event, been, in a great degree, disturbed, by a coalition against which Sheridan had always most strongly protested, and to which the Prince, there is every reason to believe, was by no means friendly. Immediately after the death of Mr. Fox, His Royal Highness made known his intentions of withdrawing from all personal interference in politics; and, though still continuing his sanction to the remaining Ministry, expressed himself as no longer desirous of being considered "a party man." * During the short time that these Ministers continued in office, the understanding between them and the Prince was by no means of that cordial and confidential kind, which had been invariably maintained during the lifetime of Mr. Fox. On the contrary, the impression on the mind of his Royal Highness, as well as on those of his immediate friends in the Ministry, Lord Moira and Mr.

* This is the phrase used by the Prince himself, in a Letter addressed to a Noble Lord, (not long after the dismissal of the Grenville Ministry,) for the purpose of vindicating his own character from some imputations cast upon it, in consequence of an interview which he had lately had with the King. This important exposition of the feelings of His Royal Highness, which, more than any thing, throws light upon his subsequent conduct, was drawn up by Sheridan; and I had hoped that I should have been able to lay it before the reader: — but the liberty of perusing the Letter is all that has been allowed me.

Sheridan, was, that a cold neglect had succeeded to the confidence with which they had hitherto been treated; and that, neither in their opinions or feelings, were they any longer sufficiently consulted or considered. The very measure, by which the Ministers ultimately lost their places, was, it appears, one of those which the Illustrious Personage in question neither conceived himself to have been sufficiently consulted upon before its adoption, nor approved of afterwards.

Such were the gradual loosenings of a bond, which at no time had promised much permanence; and such the train of feelings and circumstances which (combining with certain prejudices in the Royal mind against one of the chief leaders of the party) prepared the way for that result by which the Public was surprised in 1811, and the private details of which I shall now, as briefly as possible, relate.

As soon as the Bill for regulating the office of Regent had passed the two Houses, the Prince, who, till then, had maintained a strict reserve with respect to his intentions, signified, through Mr. Adam, his pleasure that Lord Grenville should wait upon him. He then, in the most gracious manner, expressed to that Noble Lord his wish that he should, in conjunction with Lord Grey, prepare the Answer which His Royal

CHAP. XX.

1811.

Highness was, in a few days, to return to the Address of the Houses. The same confidential task was entrusted also to Lord Moira, with an expressed desire that he should consult with Lord Grey and Lord Grenville on the subject. But this co-operation, as I understand, the two Noble Lords declined.

One of the embarrassing consequences of Coalitions now appeared. The recorded opinions of Lord Grenville on the Regency Question differed wholly and in principle not only from those of his coadjutor in this task, but from those of the Royal person himself, whose sentiments he was called upon to interpret. In this difficulty, the only alternative that remained was so to neutralise the terms of the Answer upon the great point of difference, as to preserve the consistency of the Royal speaker, without at the same time compromising that of his Noble adviser. It required, of course, no small art and delicacy thus to throw into the shade that distinctive opinion of Whiggism, which Burke had clothed in his imperishable language in 1789, and which Fox had solemnly bequeathed to the Party, when

> " in his upward flight
> He left his mantle there." *

* Joanna Baillie.

The Answer, drawn up by the Noble Lords, did not, it must be confessed, surmount this difficulty very skilfully. The assertion of the Prince's consistency was confined to two meagre sentences, in the first of which His Royal Highness was made to say: — "With respect to the proposed limitation of the authority to be entrusted to me, I retain my former opinion:" — and in the other, the expression of any decided opinion upon the Constitutional point is thus evaded: — "For such a purpose no restraint can be *necessary* to be imposed upon me." Somewhat less vague and evasive, however, was the justification of the opinion opposed to that of the Prince, in the following sentence: — "That day, when I may restore to the King those powers, which, *as belonging only to him* *, are in his name and in his behalf," &c. &c. This, it will be recollected, is precisely the doctrine, which, on the great question of limiting the Prerogative, Mr. Fox attributed to the Tories. In another passage, the Whig opinion of the Prince was thus tamely surrendered: — "Conscious that, whatever *degree* of confidence you may *think fit* to repose in me." &c. †

* The words which I have put in italics in these quotations, are, in the same manner, underlined in Sheridan's copy of the Paper, — doubtless, from a similar view of their import to that which I have taken.

† On the back of Sheridan's own copy of this Answer, I

The Answer, thus constructed, was, by the two Noble Lords, transmitted, through Mr. Adam, to the Prince, who, "strongly objecting (as we are told) to almost every part of it," acceded to the suggestion of Sheridan, whom he consulted on the subject, that a new form of Answer should be immediately sketched out, and submitted to the consideration of Lord Grey and Lord Grenville. There was no time to be lost, as the Address of the Houses was to be received the following day. Accordingly, Mr. Adam and Mr. Sheridan proceeded that night, with the new draft of the Answer, to Holland-House, where, after a warm discussion upon the subject with Lord Grey, which ended unsatisfactorily to both parties, the final result was that the Answer drawn up by the Prince and Sheridan was adopted. — Such is the bare outline of this transaction, the circumstances of which will be found fully detailed in the Statement that shall presently be given.

The accusation against Sheridan is, that chiefly to his undermining influence the view taken by

---

find, written by him, the following words: "Grenville's and Grey's proposed Answer from the Prince to the Address of the two Houses; — very flimsy, and attempting to cover Grenville's conduct and consistency in supporting the present Restrictions at the expense of the Prince."

the Prince of the Paper of these Noble Lords is to be attributed; and that not only was he censurable in a constitutional point of view, for thus interfering between the Sovereign and his responsible advisers, but that he has been also guilty of an act of private perfidy, in endeavouring to represent the Answer drawn up by these Noble Lords, as an attempt to sacrifice the consistency and dignity of their Royal Master to the compromise of opinions and principles which they had entered into themselves.

Under the impression that such were the nature and motives of his interference, Lord Grey and Lord Grenville, on the 11th of January, (the day on which the Answer substituted for their own was delivered,) presented a joint Representation to the Regent, in which they stated that "the circumstances which had occurred, respecting His Royal Highness's Answer to the two Houses, had induced them, most humbly, to solicit permission to submit to His Royal Highness the following considerations, with the undisguised sincerity which the occasion seemed to require, but, with every expression that could best convey their respectful duty and inviolable attachment. When His Royal Highness (they continued) did Lord Grenville the honour, through Mr. Adam, to command his attendance, it was distinctly expressed to him, that His

CHAP. XX.

1811.

Royal Highness had condescended to select him, in conjunction with Lord Grey, to be consulted with, as the public and responsible advisers of that Answer; and Lord Grenville could never forget the gracious terms in which His Royal Highness had the goodness to lay these his orders upon him. It was also on the same grounds of public and responsible advice, that Lord Grey, honoured in like manner by the most gracious expression of His Royal Highness's confidence on this subject, applied himself to the consideration of it conjointly with Lord Grenville. They could not but feel the difficulty of the undertaking which required them to reconcile two objects, essentially different, — to uphold and distinctly to manifest that unshaken adherence to His Royal Highness's past and present opinion, which consistency and honour required, but to conciliate, at the same time, the feelings of the two Houses, by expressions of confidence and affection, and to lay the foundation of that good understanding between His Royal Highness and the Parliament, the establishment of which must be the first wish of every man who is truly attached to His Royal Highness, and who knows the value of the Constitution of his country. Lord Grey and Lord Grenville were far from the presumption of believing that their humble endeavours for the execution of so difficult a task

might not be susceptible of many and great amendments.

" The draft (Their Lordships said) which they humbly submitted to His Royal Highness was considered by them as open to every remark which might occur to His Royal Highness's better judgment. On every occasion, but more especially in the preparation of His Royal Highness's first act of government, it would have been no less their desire than their duty to have profited by all such objections, and to have laboured to accomplish, in the best manner they were able, every command which His Royal Highness might have been pleased to lay upon them. Upon the objects to be obtained there could be no difference of sentiment. These, such as above described, were, they confidently believed, not less important in His Royal Highness's view of the subject than in that which they themselves had ventured to express. But they would be wanting in that sincerity and openness by which they could alone hope, however imperfectly, to make any return to that gracious confidence with which His Royal Highness had condescended to honour them, if they suppressed the expression of their deep concern, in finding, that their humble endeavours in His Royal Highness's service had been submitted to the judgment of another person, by whose advice His Royal

CHAP. XX.

1811.

Highness had been guided in his final decision, on a matter on which they alone had, however unworthily, been honoured with His Royal Highness's commands. It was their most sincere and ardent wish that, in the arduous station which His Royal Highness was about to fill, he might have the benefit of the public advice and responsible services of those men, whoever they might be, by whom His Royal Highness's glory and the interests of the country could best be promoted. It would be with unfeigned distrust of their own means of discharging such duties that they could, in any case, venture to undertake them; and, in this humble but respectful representation which they had presumed to make of their feelings on this occasion, they were conscious of being actuated not less by their dutiful and grateful attachment to His Royal Highness, than by those principles of constitutional responsibility, the maintenance of which they deemed essential to any hope of a successful administration of the public interests."

On receiving this Representation, in which, it must be confessed, there was more of high spirit and dignity than of worldly wisdom*, His Royal

* To the pure and dignified character of the Noble Whig associated in this Remonstrance, it is unnecessary for me to say how heartily I bear testimony. The only fault, indeed,

Highness lost no time in communicating it to Sheridan, who, proud of the influence attributed to him by the Noble writers, and now more than ever stimulated to make them feel its weight, employed the whole force of his shrewdness and ridicule* in exposing the stately tone of dictation

---

of this distinguished person is, that, knowing but one high course of conduct for himself, he impatiently resents any sinking from that pitch in others. Then, only, in his true station, when placed between the People and the Crown, as one of those fortresses that ornament and defend the frontier of Democracy, he has shown that he can but ill suit the dimensions of his spirit to the narrow avenues of a Court, or, like that Pope who *stooped* to look for the keys of St. Peter, accommodate his natural elevation to the pursuit of official power. All the pliancy of his nature is reserved for private life, where the repose of the valley succeeds to the grandeur of the mountain, and where the lofty statesman gracefully subsides into the gentle husband and father, and the frank, social friend.

The eloquence of Lord Grey, more than that of any other person, brings to mind what Quintilian says of the great and noble orator, Messala: — "*Quodammodo præ se ferens in dicendo nobilitatem suam.*"

* He called rhymes also to his aid, as appears by the following: —

"*An Address to the Prince*, 1811.

"In all humility we crave
Our Regent may become our slave,
And being so, we trust that He
Will thank us for our loyalty.

Then,

CHAP. XX. 1811.

which, according to his view, was assumed throughout this Paper, and in picturing to the Prince the state of tutelage he might expect, under Ministers who began thus early with their lectures. Such suggestions, even if less ably urged, were but too sure of a willing audience in the ears to which they were addressed. Shortly after, His Royal Highness paid a visit to Windsor, where the Queen and another Royal Personage completed what had been so skilfully begun; and the important resolution was forthwith taken to retain Mr. Perceval and his colleagues in the Ministry.

I shall now give the Statement of the whole transaction, which Mr. Sheridan thought it necessary to address, in his own defence, to Lord Holland, and of which a rough and a fair copy have been found carefully preserved among his papers:—

"Queen Street, January 15. 1811.

"DEAR HOLLAND,

"As you have been already apprised by His Royal Highness the Prince that he thought it

---

Then, if he'll help us to pull down
His Father's dignity and Crown,
We'll make him, in some time to come,
The greatest Prince in Christendom."

becoming the frankness of his character, and consistent with the fairness and openness of proceeding due to any of his servants whose conduct appears to have incurred the disapprobation of Lord Grey and Lord Grenville, to communicate their representations on the subject to the person so censured, I am confident you will give me credit for the pain I must have felt, to find myself an object of suspicion, or likely, in the slightest degree, to become the cause of any temporary misunderstanding between His Royal Highness and those distinguished characters, whom His Royal Highness appears to destine to those responsible situations, which must in all public matters entitle them to his exclusive confidence.

" I shall as briefly as I can state the circumstances of the fact, so distinctly referred to in the following passage of the Noble Lords' Representation: —

" 'But they would be wanting in that sincerity and openness by which they can alone hope, however imperfectly, to make any return to that gracious confidence with which Your Royal Highness has condesended to honour them, if they suppressed the expression of their deep concern in finding that their humble endeavours in Your Royal Highness's service have been submitted to the judgment of another person, *by*

CHAP. XX.

1811.

whose advice Your Royal Highness has been guided in your final decision on a matter in which they alone had, however unworthily, been honoured with Your Royal Highness's commands.'

" I must premise, that from my first intercourse with the Prince during the present distressing emergency, such conversations as he may have honoured me with have been communications of resolutions already formed on his part, and not of matter referred to consultation, or submitted to *advice*. I know that my declining to vote for the further adjournment of the Privy Council's examination of the physicians gave offence to some, and was considered as a difference from the party I was rightly esteemed to belong to. The intentions of the leaders of the party upon that question were in no way distinctly known to me; my secession was entirely my own act, and not only unauthorised, but perhaps unexpected by the Prince. My motives for it I took the liberty of communicating to His Royal Highness, by letter *, the next day, and previously to that, I had not even seen His Royal Highness since the confirmation of His Majesty's malady.

" If I differed from those who, equally attached to His Royal Highness's interest and honour, thought that His Royal Highness should

* This Letter has been given in page 379. of this volume.

have taken the step which, in my humble opinion, he has since, precisely at the proper period, taken, of sending to Lord Grenville and Lord Grey, I may certainly have erred in forming an imperfect judgment on the occasion, but, in doing so, I meant no disrespect to those who had taken a different view of the subject. But, with all deference, I cannot avoid adding, that experience of the impression made on the public mind by the reserved and retired conduct which the Prince thought proper to adopt, has not shaken my opinion of the wisdom which prompted him to that determination. But here, again, I declare, that I must reject the presumption that any suggestion of mine led to the rule which the Prince had prescribed to himself. My knowledge of it being, as I before said, the communication of a resolution formed on the part of His Royal Highness, and not of a proposition awaiting the advice, countenance, or corroboration, of any other person. Having thought it necessary to premise thus much, as I wish to write to you without reserve or concealment of any sort, I shall as briefly as I can relate the facts which attended the composing the Answer itself, as far as I was concerned.

"On Sunday, or on Monday the 7th instant, I mentioned to Lord Moira, or to Adam, that the Address of the two Houses would come very

CHAP. XX.

1811.

quickly upon the Prince, and that he should be prepared with his Answer, without entertaining the least idea of meddling with the subject myself, having received no authority from His Royal Highness to do so. Either Lord Moira or Adam informed me, before I left Carlton-House, that His Royal Highness had directed Lord Moira to sketch an outline of the Answer proposed, and I left town. On Tuesday evening it occurred to me to try at a sketch also of the intended reply. On Wednesday morning I read it, at Carlton-House, very hastily to Adam, before I saw the Prince. And here I must pause to declare, that I have entirely withdrawn from my mind any doubt, if for a moment I ever entertained any, of the perfect propriety of Adam's conduct at that hurried interview; being also long convinced, as well from intercourse with him at Carlton-House as in every transaction I have witnessed, that it is impossible for him to act otherwise than with the most entire sincerity and honour towards all he deals with. I then read the Paper I had put together to the Prince, — the most essential part of it literally consisting of sentiments and expressions, which had fallen from the Prince himself in different conversations; and I read it to him without *having once heard Lord Grenville's name* even mentioned, as in any way connected with the Answer

proposed to be submitted to the Prince. On the contrary, indeed, I was under an impression that the framing this Answer was considered as the single act which it would be an unfair and embarrassing task to require the performance of from Lord Grenville. The Prince approved the Paper I read to him, objecting, however, to some additional paragraph of my own, and altering others. In the course of his observations, he cursorily mentioned that Lord Grenville had undertaken to sketch out his idea of a proper Answer, and that Lord Moira had done the same, — evidently expressing himself, to my apprehension, as not considering the framing of this Answer as a matter of official responsibility any where, but that it was his intention to take the choice and decision respecting it on himself. If, however, I had known, before I entered the Prince's apartment, that Lord Grenville and Lord Grey had in any way undertaken to frame the Answer, and had thought themselves authorised to do so, I protest the Prince would never even have heard of the draft which I had prepared, though containing, as I before said, the Prince's own ideas.

"His Royal Highness having laid his commands on Adam and me to dine with him alone on the next day, Thursday, I then, for the first time, learnt that Lord Grey and Lord Grenville

CHAP. XX.

1811.

had transmitted, through Adam, a formal draft of an Answer to be submitted to the Prince.

"Under these circumstances I thought it became me humbly to request the Prince not to refer to me, in any respect, the Paper of the Noble Lords, or to insist even on my hearing its contents; but that I might be permitted to put the draft he had received from me into the fire. The Prince, however, who had read the Noble Lords' Paper, declining to hear of this, proceeded to state, how strongly he objected to almost every part of it. The draft delivered by Adam he took a copy of himself, as Mr. Adam read it, affixing shortly, but warmly, his comments to each paragraph. Finding His Royal Highness's objections to the whole radical and insuperable, and seeing no means myself by which the Noble Lords could change their draft, so as to meet the Prince's ideas, I ventured to propose, as the only expedient of which the time allowed, that both the Papers should be laid aside, and that a very short Answer, indeed, keeping clear of all topics liable to disagreement, should be immediately sketched out and be submitted that night to the judgment of Lord Grey and Lord Grenville. The lateness of the hour prevented any but very hasty discussion, and Adam and myself proceeded, by His Royal Highness's orders, to your house to relate what

had passed to Lord Grey. I do not mean to disguise, however, that when I found myself bound to give my opinion, I did fully assent to the force and justice of the Prince's objections, and made other observations of my own, which I thought it my duty to do, conceiving, as I freely said, that the Paper could not have been drawn up but under the pressure of embarrassing difficulties, and, as I conceived also, in considerable haste.

" Before we left Carlton-House, it was agreed between Adam and myself that we were not so strictly enjoined by the Prince, as to make it necessary for us to communicate to the Noble Lords the marginal comments of the Prince, and we determined to withhold them. But at the meeting with Lord Grey, at your house, he appeared to me, erroneously perhaps, to decline considering the objections as coming from the Prince, but as originating in my suggestions. Upon this, I certainly called on Adam to produce the Prince's copy, with his notes, in His Royal Highness's own hand-writing.

" Afterwards finding myself considerably hurt at an expression of Lord Grey's, which could only be pointed at me, and which expressed his opinion that the whole of the Paper, which he assumed me to be responsible for, was ' drawn up in an invidious spirit,' I certainly did, with

CHAP. XX. 1811.

more warmth than was, perhaps, discreet, comment on the Paper proposed to be substituted; and there ended, with no good effect, our interview.

"Adam and I saw the Prince again that night, when His Royal Highness was graciously pleased to meet our joint and earnest request, by striking out from the draft of the Answer, to which he still resolved to adhere, every passage which we conceived to be most liable to objection on the part of Lord Grey and Lord Grenville.

"On the next morning, Friday, — a short time before he was to receive the Address, — when Adam returned from the Noble Lords, with their expressed disclaimer of the preferred Answer, altered as it was, His Royal Highness still persevered to eradicate every remaining word which he thought might yet appear exceptionable to them, and made further alterations, although the fair copy of the paper had been made out.

"Thus the Answer, nearly reduced to the expression of the Prince's own suggestions, and without an opportunity of farther meeting the wishes of the Noble Lords, was delivered by His Royal Highness, and presented by the Deputation of the two Houses.

"I am ashamed to have been thus prolix and circumstantial, upon a matter which may appear

to have admitted of much shorter explanation; but when misconception has produced distrust among those, I hope, not willingly disposed to differ, and who can have, I equally trust, but one common object in view in their different stations, I know no better way than by minuteness and accuracy of detail to remove whatever may have appeared doubtful in conduct, while unexplained, or inconsistent in principle not clearly re-asserted.

"And now, my dear Lord, I have only shortly to express my own personal mortification, I will use no other word, that I should have been considered by any persons, however high in rank, or justly entitled to high political pretensions, as one so little 'attached to His Royal Highness,' or so ignorant of the value 'of the Constitution of his country,' as to be held out to HIM, whose fairly-earned esteem I regard as the first honour and the sole reward of my political life, in the character of an interested contriver of a double government, and, in some measure, as an apostate from all my former principles, — which have taught me, as well as the Noble Lords, that 'the maintenance of constitutional responsibility in the ministers of the Crown is essential to any hope of success in the administration of the public interest.'

"At the same time, I am most ready to admit

CHAP. XX.

1811.

that it could not be their *intention* so to characterise me; but it is the direct inference which others must gather from the first paragraph I have quoted from their Representation, and an inference which, I understand, has already been raised in public opinion. A departure, my dear Lord, on my part, from upholding the principle declared by the Noble Lords, much more a presumptuous and certainly ineffectual attempt to inculcate a contrary doctrine on the mind of the Prince of Wales, would, I am confident, lose me every particle of his favour and confidence at once and for ever. But I am yet to learn what part of my past public life, — and I challenge observation on every part of my present proceedings, — has warranted the adoption of any such suspicion of me, or the expression of any such imputation against me. But I will dwell no longer on this point, as it relates only to my own feelings and character; which, however, I am the more bound to consider, as others, in my humble judgment, have so hastily disregarded both. At the same time, I do sincerely declare, that no personal disappointment in my own mind interferes with the respect and esteem I entertain for Lord Grenville, or in addition to those sentiments, the friendly regard I owe to Lord Grey. To Lord Grenville I have the honour to be but very little personally known.

From Lord Grey, intimately acquainted as he was with every circumstance of my conduct and principles in the years 1788-9, I confess I should have expected a very tardy and reluctant interpretation of any circumstance to my disadvantage. What the nature of my endeavours were at that time, I have the written testimonies of Mr. Fox and the Duke of Portland. To you I know those testimonies are not necessary, and perhaps it has been my recollection of what passed in those times that may have led me too securely to conceive myself above the reach even of a suspicion that I could adopt different principles now. Such as they were they remain untouched and unaltered. I conclude with sincerely declaring, that to see the Prince meeting the reward which his own honourable nature, his kind and generous disposition, and his genuine devotion to the true objects of our free Constitution so well entitle him to, by being surrounded and supported by an Administration affectionate to his person, and ambitious of gaining and meriting his entire esteem, (yet tenacious, above all things, of the constitutional principle, that exclusive confidence must attach to the responsibility of those whom he selects to be his public servants,) I would with heartfelt satisfaction rather be a looker on of such a Government, giving it such humble support as might be in my power, than be the possessor of any

CHAP. XX. 1811.

possible situation either of profit or ambition, to be obtained by any indirectness, or by the slightest departure from the principles I have always professed, and which I have now felt myself in a manner called upon to re-assert.

"I have only to add, that my respect for the Prince, and my sense of the frankness he has shown towards me on this occasion, decide me, with all duty, to submit this letter to his perusal, before I place it in your hands; meaning it undoubtedly to be by you shown to those to whom your judgment may deem it of any consequence to communicate it.

"I have the honour to be, &c.

"(Signed) R. B. SHERIDAN.

"*To Lord Holland.*

"Read and approved by the Prince, January 20. 1811.

"R. B. S."

Though this Statement, it must be recollected, exhibits but one side of the question, and is silent as to the part that Sheridan took after the delivery of the Remonstrance of the two Noble Lords, yet, combined with preceding events and with the insight into motives which they afford, it may sufficiently enable the reader to form his own judgment, with respect to the conduct of the different persons concerned in

the transaction. With the better and more ostensible motives of Sheridan, there was, no doubt, some mixture of, what the Platonists call, the "material alluvion" of our nature. His political repugnance to the Coalesced Leaders would have been less strong but for the personal feelings that mingled with it; and his anxiety that the Prince should not be dictated to by others was at least equalled by his vanity in showing that he could govern him himself. But, whatever were the precise views that impelled him to this trial of strength, the victory which he gained in it was far more extensive than he himself had either foreseen or wished. He had meant the party to *feel* his power, — not to sink under it. Though privately alienated from them, on personal as well as political grounds, he knew that, publicly, he was too much identified with their ranks, ever to serve, with credit or consistency, in any other. He had, therefore, in the ardour of undermining, carried the ground from beneath his own feet. In helping to disband his party, he had cashiered himself; and there remained to him now, for the residue of his days, but that frailest of all sublunary treasures, a Prince's friendship.

With this conviction, (which, in spite of all the sanguineness of his disposition, could hardly have failed to force itself on his mind,) it was not, we

CHAP. XX.

1811.

should think, with very self-gratulatory feelings that he undertook the task, a few weeks after, of inditing, for the Regent, that memorable Letter to Mr. Perceval, which sealed the fate at once both of his party and himself, and, whatever false signs of re-animation may afterwards have appeared, severed the last *life-lock* by which the "struggling spirit*" of this friendship between Royalty and Whiggism still held: —

—— "*dextra crinem secat, omnis et una*
Dilapsus calor, atque in ventos vita recessit."

With respect to the chief Personage connected with these transactions, it is a proof of the tendency of knowledge to produce a spirit of tolerance, that they who, judging merely from the surface, have been most forward in reprobating his separation from the Whigs, as a rupture of political ties and an abandonment of private friendships, must, on becoming more thoroughly acquainted with all the circumstances that led to this crisis, learn to soften down considerably their angry feelings; and to see, indeed, in the whole history of the connection, — from its first formation, in the hey-day of youth and party, to its faint survival after the death of Mr. Fox, but a natural and destined gradation towards the

* *Luctans anima.*

result at which it at last arrived, after as much fluctuation of political principle, on one side, as there was of indifference, perhaps, to all political principle on the other.

Among the arrangements that had been made, in contemplation of a new ministry, at this time, it was intended that Lord Moira should go, as Lord-Lieutenant, to Ireland, and that Mr. Sheridan should accompany him, as Chief Secretary.

CHAP. XXI.

AFFAIRS OF THE NEW THEATRE. — MR. WHITBREAD. — NEGOTIATIONS WITH LORD GREY AND LORD GRENVILLE. — CONDUCT OF MR. SHERIDAN RELATIVE TO THE HOUSEHOLD. — HIS LAST WORDS IN PARLIAMENT.—FAILURE AT STAFFORD. — CORRESPONDENCE WITH MR. WHITBREAD. — LORD BYRON. — DISTRESSES OF SHERIDAN. — ILLNESS. — DEATH AND FUNERAL. — GENERAL REMARKS.

CHAP. XXI.

1811.

It was not till the close of this year that the Reports of the Committee, appointed under the Act for rebuilding the Theatre of Drury Lane, were laid before the public. By these it appeared that Sheridan was to receive, for his moiety of the property, 24,000*l.*, out of which sum the claims of the Linley family and others were to be satisfied; that a further sum of 4000*l.* was to be paid to him for the property of the Fruit Offices and Reversion of Boxes and Shares; — and that his son, Mr. Thomas Sheridan, was to receive, for his quarter of the Patent Property, 12,000*l.*

The gratitude that Sheridan felt to Mr. Whitbread at first, for the kindness with which he undertook this most arduous task, did not long remain unembittered when they entered into

practical details. It would be difficult to find two persons less likely to agree in a transaction of this nature — the one, in affairs of business, approaching almost as near to the extreme of rigour as the other to that of laxity. While Sheridan, too, — like those painters, who endeavour to disguise their ignorance of anatomy by an indistinct and *furzy* outline, — had an imposing method of generalising his accounts and statements, which, to most eyes, concealed the negligence and fallacy of the details, Mr. Whitbread, on the contrary, with an unrelenting accuracy, laid open the minutiæ of every transaction, and made evasion as impossible to others, as it was alien and inconceivable to himself. He was, perhaps, the only person whom Sheridan had ever found proof against his powers of persuasion; — and this rigidity naturally mortified his pride full as much as it thwarted and disconcerted his views.

Among the conditions to which he agreed, in order to facilitate the arrangements of the Committee, the most painful to him was that which stipulated that he, himself, should "have no concern or connection, of any kind whatever, with the new undertaking." This concession, however, he, at first, regarded as a mere matter of form — feeling confident that, even without any effort of his own, the necessity under which the new Committee would find themselves of

CHAP. XXI.

1811.

recurring to his advice and assistance, would, ere long, reinstate him in all his former influence. But in this hope he was disappointed; — his exclusion from all concern in the new Theatre (which, it is said, was made a *sine quâ non* by all who embarked in it,) was inexorably enforced by Whitbread; and the following letter addressed by him to the latter will show the state of their respective feelings on this point: —

"My dear Whitbread,

"I am not going to write you a controversial or even an argumentative letter, but simply to put down the heads of a few matters which I wish shortly to converse with you upon, in the most amicable and temperate manner, deprecating the impatience which may sometimes have mixed in our discussions, and not contending who has been the aggressor.

"The main point you seem to have had so much at heart you have carried, so there is an end of that; and I shall as fairly and cordially endeavour to advise and assist Mr. Benjamin Wyatt in the improving and perfecting his plan as if it had been my own preferable selection, assuming, as I must do, that there cannot exist an individual in England so presumptuous or so void of common sense as not sincerely to solicit the aid of my practical experience on this occa-

sion, even were I not, in justice to the Subscribers, bound spontaneously to offer it.

"But it would be unmanly dissimulation in me to retain the sentiments I do with respect to *your* doctrine on this subject, and not express what I so strongly feel. That doctrine was, to my utter astonishment, to say no more, first promulgated to me in a letter from you, written in town, in the following terms. Speaking of building and plans, you say to me, '*You are in no way answerable if a bad Theatre is built: it is not* YOU *who built it; and if we come to the* STRICT RIGHT *of the thing, you have* NO BUSINESS TO INTERFERE;' and further on you say, '*Will* YOU *but* STAND ALOOF, *and every thing will go smooth,* and a good Theatre shall be built;' and in conversation you put, as a similar case, that, '*if a man sold another a piece of land, it was nothing to the seller whether the purchaser built himself a good or a bad house upon it.*' Now I declare before God I never felt more amazement than that a man of your powerful intellect, just view of all subjects, and knowledge of the world, should hold such language or resort to such arguments; and I must be convinced, that, although in an impatient moment this opinion may have fallen from you, upon the least reflection or the slightest attention to the reason of the case, you would, 'albeit unused to the retracting mood,'

CHAP. XXI.

1811.

confess the erroneous view you had taken of the subject. Otherwise, I must think, and with the deepest regret would it be, that although you originally engaged in this business from motives of the purest and kindest regard for me and my family, your ardour and zealous eagerness to accomplish the difficult task you had undertaken have led you, in this instance, to overlook what is due to my feelings, to my honour, and my just interests. For, supposing I were to '*stand aloof*,' totally unconcerned, provided I were paid for my share, whether the new Theatre were excellent or execrable, and that the result should be that the Subscribers, instead of profit, could not, through the misconstruction of the house, obtain one per cent. for their money, do you seriously believe you could find a single man, woman, or child, in the kingdom, out of the Committee, who would believe that I was wholly guiltless of the failure, having been so stultified and proscribed by the Committee, (a Committee of *my own nomination*,) as to have been compelled to admit, as the condition of my being paid for my share, that 'it was nothing to me whether the Theatre was good or bad?' or, on the contrary, can it be denied that the reproaches of disappointment, through the great body of the Subscribers, would be directed against me and me alone?

"So much as to *character*: — now as to my feelings on the subject; — I must say that in friendship, at least, if not in '*strict right*,' they ought to be consulted, even though the Committee could either prove that I had not to apprehend any share in the discredit and discontent which might follow the ill success of their plan, or that I was entitled to brave whatever malice or ignorance might direct against me. Next, and lastly, as to my just interest in the property I am to part with, a consideration to which, however careless I might be were I alone concerned, I am bound to attend in justice to my own private creditors, observe how the matter stands: — I agree to wave my own '*strict right*' to be paid before the funds can be applied to the building, and this in the confidence and on the continued understanding, that my advice should be so far respected, that, even should the subscription not fill, I should at least see a Theatre capable of being charged with and ultimately of discharging what should remain justly due to the proprietors. To illustrate this I refer to the size of the pit, the number of private boxes, and the annexation of a tavern; but in what a situation would the doctrine of your Committee leave me and my son? 'It is nothing to us how the Theatre is built, or whether it

CHAP. XXI.

1811.

prospers or not.' These are two circumstances we have nothing to do with; only, unfortunately, upon *them* may depend our best chance of receiving any payment for the property we part with. It is nothing to us how the ship is refitted or manned, only we must leave all we are worth on board her, and abide the chance of her success. Now I am confident your justice will see, that in order that the Committee should, in '*strict right*,' become entitled to deal thus with us, and bid us *stand aloof*, they should buy us out, and make good the payment. But the reverse of this has been my own proposal, and I neither repent nor wish to make any change in it.

"I have totally departed from my intention, when I first began this letter, for which I ought to apologise to you; but it may save much future talk: other less important matters will do in conversation. You will allow that I have placed in you the most implicit confidence — have the reasonable trust in me that, in any communication I may have with B. Wyatt, my object will not be to *obstruct*, as you have hastily expressed it, but *bonâ fide* to assist him to render his Theatre as perfect as possible, as well with a view to the public accommodation as to profit to the Subscribers; neither of which

can be obtained without establishing a reputation for him which must be the basis of his future fortune.

" And now, after all this statement, you will perhaps be surprised to find how little I require; simply some Resolution of the Committee to the effect of that I enclose.

" I conclude with heartily thanking you for the declaration you made respecting me, and reported to me by Peter Moore, at the close of the last meeting of the Committee. I am convinced of your sincerity; but, as I have before described the character of the gratitude I feel towards you in a letter written likewise in this house, I have only to say, that every sentiment in that letter remains unabated and unalterable.

" Ever, my dear Whitbread,

" Yours, faithfully.

" P. S. The discussion we had yesterday respecting some investigation of the *past*, which I deem so essential to my character and to my peace of mind, and your present concurrence with me on that subject, have relieved my mind from great anxiety, though I cannot but still think the better opportunity has been passed by. One word more, and I release you. Tom informed me that you had hinted to him that any demands, not practicable to be settled by the Committee, must fall on the proprietors. My

CHAP. XXI.

1811.

resolution is to take all such on myself, and to leave Tom's share untouched."

Another concession, which Sheridan himself had volunteered, namely, the postponement of his right of being paid the amount of his claim, till after the Theatre should be built, was also a subject of much acrimonicus discussion between the two friends, — Sheridan applying to this condition that sort of lax interpretation, which would have left him the credit of the sacrifice without its inconvenience, and Whitbread, with a firmness of grasp, to which, unluckily, the other had been unaccustomed in business, holding him to the strict letter of his voluntary agreement with the Subscribers. Never, indeed, was there a more melancholy example than Sheridan exhibited, at this moment, of the last, hard struggle of pride and delicacy against the most deadly foe of both, pecuniary involvement, — which thus gathers round its victims, fold after fold, till they are at length crushed in its inextricable clasp.

The mere likelihood of a sum of money being placed at his disposal was sufficient — like the "bright day that brings forth the adder" — to call into life the activity of all his duns; and how liberally he made the fund available among them, appears from the following letter of Whit-

bread, addressed, not to Sheridan himself, but, apparently, (for the direction is wanting,) to some man of business connected with him: —

"My dear Sir,

"I had determined not to give any written answer to the note you put into my hands yesterday morning; but a further perusal of it leads me to think it better to make a statement in writing why I, for one, cannot comply with the request it contains, and to repel the impression which appears to have existed in Mr. Sheridan's mind at the time that note was written. He insinuates that to some postponement of his interests, by the Committee, is owing the distressed situation in which he is unfortunately placed.

"Whatever postponement of the interests of the Proprietors may ultimately be resorted to, as matter of indispensable necessity from the state of the Subscription Fund, will originate in the written suggestion of Mr. Sheridan himself; and, in certain circumstances, unless such latitude were allowed on his part, the execution of the Act could not have been attempted.

"At present there is no postponement of his interests; —but there is an utter impossibility of touching the Subscription Fund at all, except for very trifling specified articles, until a sup-

CHAP. XXI.

1811.

plementary Act of Parliament shall have been obtained.

" By the present Act, even if the Subscription were full, and no impediments existed to the use of the money, the Act itself, and the incidental expenses of plans, surveys, &c., are first to be paid for, — then the portion of Killigrew's Patent, — then the claimants, — and *then* the Proprietors. Now the Act is not paid for: White and Martindale are not paid; and not one single claimant is paid, nor can any one of them *be* paid, until we have fresh powers and additional subscriptions.

" How then can Mr. Sheridan attribute to any postponement of his interests, actually made by the Committee, the present condition of his affairs? and why are we driven to these observations and explanations?

" We cannot but all deeply lament his distress, but the palliation he proposes it is not in our power to give.

" We cannot guarantee Mr. Hammersley upon the fund coming eventually to Mr. Sheridan. He alludes to the claims he has already created upon that fund. He must, besides, recollect the list of names he sent to me some time ago, of persons to whom he felt himself in honour bound to appropriate to each his share of that fund, in common with others for whose names

he left a blank, and who, he says in the same letter, have written engagements from him. Besides, he has communicated both to Mr. Taylor and to Mr. Shaw, through me, offers to impound the whole of the sum to answer the issue of the unsettled demands made upon him by those gentlemen respectively.

" How then can we guarantee Mr. Hammersley in the payment of any sum out of this fund, so circumstanced? Mr. Hammersley's possible profits are prospective, and the prospect remote. I know the positive losses he sustains, and the sacrifices he is obliged to make to procure the chance of the compromise he is willing to accept.

" Add to all this, that we are still struggling with difficulties which we may or may not overcome; that those difficulties are greatly increased by the persons, whose interest and duty should equally lead them to give us every facility and assistance in the labours we have disinterestedly undertaken, and are determined faithfully to discharge. If we fail at last, from whatever cause, the whole vanishes.

" You know, my dear sir, that I grieve for the sad state of Mr. Sheridan's affairs. I would contribute my mite to their temporary relief, if it would be acceptable; but as one of the Committee, intrusted with a public fund, I can do

nothing. I cannot be a party to any claim upon Mr. Hammersley; and I utterly deny that, individually, or as part of the Committee, any step taken by me, or with my concurrence, has pressed upon the circumstances of Mr. Sheridan.

"I am,

"My dear Sir,

"Faithfully yours,

"SAMUEL WHITBREAD.

"Southill, Dec. 19. 1811."

A Dissolution of Parliament being expected to take place, Mr. Sheridan again turned his eyes to Stafford; and, in spite of the estrangement to which his infidelities at Westminster had given rise, saw enough, he thought, of the "*veteris vestigia flammæ*" to encourage him to hope for a renewal of the connexion. The following letter to Sir Oswald Moseley explains his views and expectations on the subject: —

"Cavendish Square, Nov. 29. 1811.

"DEAR SIR OSWALD,

"Being apprised that you have decided to decline offering yourself a candidate for Stafford, when a future election may arrive,—a place where you are highly esteemed, and where every humble service in my power, as I have before declared to you, should have been at your command, —

I have determined to accept the very cordial invitations I have received from *old friends* in that quarter, and (though entirely secure of my seat at Ilchester, and, indeed, even of the second seat for my son, through the liberality of Sir W. Manners,) to return to the old goal from whence I started thirty-one years since! You will easily see that arrangements at Ilchester may be made towards assisting me, in point of expense, to meet *any opposition*, and, *in that respect*, nothing will be *wanting*. It will, I confess, be very gratifying to me to be again elected by *the sons of those* who chose me in the year *eighty*, and adhered to me so stoutly and so long. I think I was returned for Stafford seven, if not eight times, including two most tough and expensive contests; and, in taking a temporary leave of them I am sure my credit must stand well, for not a shilling did I leave unpaid. I have written to the Jerninghams, who, in the handsomest manner, have ever given me their warmest support; and, as no political object interests my mind so much as the Catholic cause, I have no doubt that, independent of their personal friendship, I shall receive a continuation of their honourable support. I feel it to be no presumption to add, that other respectable interests in the neighbourhood will be with me.

CHAP. XXI.

1812.

"I need scarcely add my sanguine hope, that whatever interest rests with you (which ought to be much) will also be in my favour.

"I have the honour to be,

"With great esteem and regard,

"Yours most sincerely,

"R. B. SHERIDAN.

"I mean to be in Stafford from Lord G. Leveson's in about a fortnight."

Among a number of notes addressed to his former constituents at this time, (which I find written in his neatest hand, as if *intended* to be sent), is this curious one: —

"Cavendish Square, Sunday night.

"DEAR KING JOHN,

"I shall be in Stafford in the course of next week, and if Your Majesty does not renew our old alliance I shall never again have faith in any potentate on earth.

"Yours very sincerely,

"*Mr. John K.* R. B. SHERIDAN."

The two attempts that were made in the course of the year 1812 — the one, on the cessation of the Regency Restrictions, and the other after the assassination of Mr. Perceval, — to bring the Whigs into official relations with the Court, were,

it is evident, but little inspired, on either side, with the feelings likely to lead to such a result. It requires but a perusal of the published correspondence, in both cases, to convince us that, at the bottom of all these evolutions of negotiation, there was any thing but a sincere wish that the object to which they related should be accomplished. The Maréchal Bassompiere was not more afraid of succeeding in his warfare, when he said, "*Je crois que nous serons assez fous pour prendre la Rochelle,*" than was one of the parties, at least, in these negotiations, of any favourable turn that might inflict success upon its overtures. Even where the Court — as in the contested point of the Household — professed its readiness to accede to the surrender so injudiciously demanded of it, those who acted as its discretionary organs knew too well the real wishes in that quarter, and had been too long and faithfully zealous in their devotion to those wishes, to leave any fear that advantage would be taken of the concession. But, however high and chivalrous was the feeling with which Lord Moira, on this occasion, threw himself into the breach for his Royal Master, the service of Sheridan, though flowing partly from the same zeal, was not, I grieve to say, of the same clear and honourable character.

Lord Yarmouth, it is well known, stated in the

CHAP. XXI.

1812.

House of Commons that he had communicated to Mr. Sheridan the intention of the Household to resign, with the view of having that intention conveyed to Lord Grey and Lord Grenville, and thus removing the sole ground upon which these Noble Lords objected to the acceptance of office. Not only, however, did Sheridan endeavour to dissuade the Noble Vice-Chamberlain from resigning, but, with an unfairness of dealing which admits, I own, of no vindication, he withheld from the two leaders of Opposition the intelligence thus meant to be conveyed to them; and, when questioned by Mr. Tierney as to the rumoured intentions of the Household to resign, offered to bet five hundred guineas that there was no such step in contemplation.

In this conduct, which he made but a feeble attempt to explain, and which I consider as the only indefensible part of his whole public life, he was, in some degree, no doubt, influenced by personal feelings against the two Noble Lords, whom his want of fairness on the occasion was so well calculated to thwart and embarrass. But the main motive of the whole proceeding is to be found in his devoted deference to what he knew to be the wishes and feelings of that Personage, who had become now, more than ever, the mainspring of all his movements, — whose spell over him, in this instance, was too strong for even

his sense of character; and to whom he might well have applied the words of one of his own beautiful songs:—

> "Friends, fortune, *fame itself* I'd lose,
> To gain one smile from thee!"

So fatal, too often, are Royal friendships, — whose attraction, like the loadstone-rock, in Eastern fable, that drew the nails out of the luckless ships that came near it, steals gradually away the strength by which character is held together, till, at last, it loosens at all points, and falls to pieces a wreck!

In proof of the fettering influence under which he acted on this occasion, we find him, in one of his evasive attempts at vindication, suppressing, from delicacy to his Royal Master, a circumstance which, if mentioned, would have redounded considerably to his own credit. After mentioning that the Regent had "asked his opinion with respect to the negotiations that were going on," he adds, "I gave him my opinion, and I most devoutly wish that that opinion could be published to the world, that it might serve to shame those who now belie me."

The following is the fact to which these expressions allude. When the Prince Regent, on the death of Mr. Perceval, entrusted to Lord

Wellesley the task of forming an Administration, it appears that His Royal Highness had signified either his intention or wish to exclude a certain Noble Earl from the arrangements to be made under that commission. On learning this, Sheridan not only expressed strongly his opinion against such a step, but having, afterwards, reason to fear that the freedom with which he spoke on the subject, had been displeasing to the Regent, he addressed a letter to that illustrious Person (a copy of which I have in my possession), in which, after praising the "wisdom and magnanimity" displayed by His Royal Highness, in confiding to Lord Wellesley the powers that had just been entrusted to him, he repeated his opinion that any "proscription" of the Noble Earl in question would be "a proceeding equally derogatory to the estimation of His Royal Highness's personal dignity and the security of his political power; — adding, that the advice which he took the liberty of giving against such a step, did not proceed "from any peculiar partiality to the Noble Earl, or to many of those with whom he was allied; but was founded on what he considered to be best for his Royal Highness's honour and interest, and for the general interests of the country."

The letter (in alluding to the displeasure which he feared he had incurred by venturing this opinion) concludes thus: —

"Junius said in a public letter of his, addressed to your Royal Father, 'the fate that made you a king forbad your having a friend.' I deny his proposition, as a general maxim — I am confident that Your Royal Highness possesses qualities to win and secure to you the attachment and devotion of private friendship, in spite of your being a Sovereign. At least I feel that I am entitled to make this declaration as far as relates to myself — and I do it under the assured conviction that you will never require from me any proof of that attachment and devotion inconsistent with the clear and honourable independence of mind and conduct, which constitute my sole value as a public man, and which have hitherto been my best recommendation to your gracious favour, confidence, and protection."

It is to be regretted that while by this wise advice he helped to save His Royal Master from the invidious *appearance* of acting upon a principle of exclusion, he should, by his private management afterwards, have but too well contrived

CHAP. XXI.

1812.

to secure to him all the advantage of that principle in *reality*.

The political career of Sheridan was now drawing fast to a close. He spoke but upon two or three other occasions during the Session; and among the last sentences uttered by him in the House were the following;—which, as calculated to leave a sweeter flavour on the memory, at parting, than those questionable transactions that have just been related, I have great pleasure in citing:—

"My objection to the present Ministry is, that they are avowedly arrayed and embodied against a principle,—that of concession to the Catholics of Ireland,—which I think, and must always think, essential to the safety of this empire. I will never give my vote to any Administration that opposes the question of Catholic Emancipation. I will not consent to receive a furlough upon that particular question, even though a Ministry were carrying every other that I wished. In fine, I think the situation of Ireland a paramount consideration. If they were to be the last words I should ever utter in this House, I should say, 'Be just to Ireland, as you value your own honour;—be just to Ireland, as you value your own peace.'"

His very last words in Parliament, on his own motion relative to the Overtures of Peace from France, were as follow:—

"Yet, after the general subjugation and ruin of Europe, should there ever exist an independent historian to record the awful events that produced this universal calamity, let that historian have to say, — 'Great Britain fell, and with her fell all the best securities for the charities of human life, for the power and honour, the fame, the glory, and the liberties not only of herself, but of the whole civilised world.'"

In the month of September following, Parliament was dissolved; and, presuming upon the encouragement which he had received from some of his Stafford friends, he again tried his chance of election for that borough, but without success. This failure he, himself, imputed, as will be seen by the following letter, to the refusal of Mr. Whitbread to advance him 2000*l.* out of the sum due to him by the Committee for his share of the property: —

"Cook's Hotel, Nov. 1. 1812.

"Dear Whitbread,

"I was misled to expect you in town the beginning of last week, but being positively assured that you will arrive to-morrow, I have declined accompanying Hester into Hampshire as I intended, and she has gone to-day without me; but I must leave town to join her *as soon as I can.* We must have some serious, but yet I hope, friendly conversation respecting my un-

CHAP. XXI.

1812.

settled claims on the Drury Lane Theatre Corporation. A concluding paragraph, in one of your last letters to Burgess, which he thought himself justified in showing me, leads me to believe that it is not your object to distress or destroy me. On the subject of your refusing to advance to me the 2000*l.* I applied for to take with me to Stafford, out of the large sum confessedly due to me, (unless I signed some paper containing I know not what, and which you presented to my breast like a cocked pistol on the last day I saw you,) I will not dwell. *This, and this alone lost me my election.* You deceive yourself if you give credit to any other causes, which the pride of my friends chose to attribute our failure to, rather than confess our poverty. I do not mean now to expostulate with you, much less to reproach you, but sure I am that when you contemplate the positive injustice of refusing me the accommodation I required, and the irreparable injury that refusal has cast on me, overturning, probably, all the honour and independence of what remains of my political life, you will deeply reproach yourself.

" I shall make an application to the Committee, when I hear you have appointed one, for the assistance which most pressing circumstances now compel me to call for; and all I desire is, through a sincere wish that our friendship may

not be interrupted, that the answer to that application may proceed from a *bonâ fide Committee, with their signatures*, testifying their decision.

" I am, yet,

" Yours very sincerely,

" *S. Whitbread, Esq.* R. B. SHERIDAN."

Notwithstanding the angry feeling which is expressed in this letter, and which the state of poor Sheridan's mind, goaded as he was now by distress and disappointment, may well excuse, it will be seen by the following letter from Whitbread, written on the very eve of the elections in September, that there was no want of inclination on the part of this honourable and excellent man, to afford assistance to his friend, — but that the duties of the perplexing trust which he had undertaken rendered such irregular advances as Sheridan required impossible : —

" MY DEAR SHERIDAN,

" We will not enter into details, although you are quite mistaken in them. You know how happy I shall be to propose to the Committee to agree to any thing practicable ; and you may make all practicable, if you will have resolution to look at the state of the account between you and the Committee, and agree to the mode of its liquidation.

CHAP. XXI.

1812.

"You will recollect the 5000*l.* pledged to Peter Moore to answer demands; the certificates given to Giblet, Ker, Ironmonger, Cross, and Hirdle, five each at your request; the engagements given to Ellis and myself, and the arrears to the Linley family. All this taken into consideration will leave a large balance still payable to you. Still there are upon that balance the claims upon you by Shaw, Taylor, and Grubb, for all of which you have offered to leave the whole of your compensation in my hands, to abide the issue of arbitration.

"This may be managed by you ageeing to take a considerable portion of your balance in bonds, leaving those bonds in trust to answer the events.

"I shall be in town on Monday to the Committee, and will be prepared with a sketch of the state of your account with the Committee, and with the mode in which I think it would be prudent for you and them to adjust it; which if you will agree to, and direct the conveyance to be made forthwith, I will undertake to propose the advance of money you wish. But without a clear arrangement, as a justification, nothing can be done.

"I shall be in Dover Street at nine o'clock, and be there and in Drury Lane all day. The Queen comes, but the day is not fixed. The

election will occupy me after Monday. After that is over, I hope we shall see you.

CHAP. XXI. 1812.

"Yours very truly,

"Southill, Sept. 25. 1812. S. WHITBREAD."

The feeling entertained by Sheridan towards the Committee had already been strongly manifested this year by the manner in which Mrs. Sheridan received the Resolution passed by them, offering her the use of a box in the new Theatre. The notes of Whitbread to Mrs. Sheridan on this subject prove how anxious he was to conciliate the wounded feelings of his friend: —

"MY DEAR ESTHER,

"I have delayed sending the enclosed Resolution of the Drury Lane Committee to you, because I had hoped to have found a moment to have called upon you, and to have delivered it into your hands. But I see no chance of that, and therefore literally obey my instructions in writing to you.

"I had great pleasure in proposing the Resolution, which was cordially and unanimously adopted. I had it always in contemplation, — but to have proposed it earlier would have been improper. I hope you will derive much amuse-

CHAP. XXI. 1812.

ment from your visits to the Theatre, and that you and all of your name will ultimately be pleased with what has been done. I have just had a most satisfactory letter from Tom Sheridan.

" I am,
" My dear Esther,
" Affectionately yours,
" SAMUEL WHITBREAD.

" Dover Street, July 4. 1812."

" MY DEAR ESTHER,

" It has been a great mortification and disappointment to me, to have met the Committee twice, since the offer of the use of a box at the new Theatre was made to you, and that I have not had to report the slightest acknowledgment from you in return.

" The Committee meet again to-morrow, and after that there will be no meeting for some time. If I shall be compelled to return the same blank answer I have hitherto done, the inference drawn will naturally be, that what was designed by myself, who moved it, and by those who voted it, as a gratifying mark of attention to Sheridan through you (as the most gratifying mode of conveying it), has, for some unaccountable reason, been mistaken, and is declined.

"But I shall be glad to know before to-morrow, what is your determination on the subject.

"I am, dear Esther,

"Affectionately yours,

"S. WHITBREAD.

"Dover Street, July 12. 1812."

The failure of Sheridan at Stafford completed his ruin. He was now excluded both from the Theatre and from Parliament:—the two anchors by which he held in life were gone, and he was left a lonely and helpless wreck upon the waters. The Prince Regent offered to bring him into Parliament; but the thought of returning to that scene of his triumphs and his freedom, with the Royal owner's mark, as it were, upon him, was more than he could bear—and he declined the offer. Indeed, miserable and insecure as his life was now, when we consider the public humiliations to which he would have been exposed, between his ancient pledge to Whiggism and his attachment and gratitude to Royalty, it is not wonderful that he should have preferred even the alternative of arrests and imprisonments to the risk of bringing upon his political name any further tarnish in such a struggle. Neither could his talents have much longer continued to do themselves justice, amid the pressure of such cares, and the increased indulgence of habits

CHAP. XXI.

1813.

which, as is usual, gained upon him, as all other indulgences vanished. The ancients, we are told, by a significant device, inscribed on the wreaths they wore at banquets the name of Minerva. Unfortunately, from the festal wreath of Sheridan this name was now but too often effaced; and the same charm that once had served to give a quicker flow to thought, was now employed to muddy the stream, as it became painful to contemplate what was at the bottom of it. By his exclusion, therefore, from Parliament, he was, perhaps, seasonably saved from affording to that "Folly, which loves the martyrdom of Fame *," the spectacle of a great mind, not only surviving itself, but, like the champion in Berni, continuing the combat after life is gone: —

"*Andava combattendo, ed era morto.*"

In private society, however, he could even now, (before the Rubicon of the cup was passed,)

* "And Folly loves the martyrdom of Fame."

This fine line is in Lord Byron's Monody to his memory. There is another line, equally true and touching, where, alluding to the irregularities of the latter part of Sheridan's life, he says, —

"And what to them seem'd vice might be but woe."

fully justify his high reputation for agreeableness and wit; and a day which it was my good fortune to spend with him, at the table of Mr. Rogers, has too many mournful, as well as pleasant, associations connected with it, to be easily forgotten by the survivors of the party. The company consisted but of Mr. Rogers himself, Lord Byron, Mr. Sheridan, and the writer of this Memoir. Sheridan knew the admiration his audience felt for him; the presence of the young poet, in particular, seemed to bring back his own youth and wit; and the details he gave of his early life were not less interesting and animating to himself than delightful to us. It was in the course of this evening that, describing to us the poem which Mr. Whitbread had written and sent in, among the other Addresses for the opening of Drury Lane, and which, like the rest, turned chiefly on allusions to the Phenix, he said, — "But Whitbread made more of this bird than any of them: — he entered into particulars, and described its wings, beak, tail, &c.; in short, it was a *Poulterer*'s description of a Phenix!"

The following extract from a Diary in my possession, kept by Lord Byron during six months of his residence in London, 1812-13, will show the admiration which this great and generous spirit felt for Sheridan: —

CHAP. XXI.

1813.

" Saturday, December, 18. 1813.

" Lord Holland told me a curious piece of *sentimentality* in Sheridan. The other night we were all delivering our respective and various opinions on him and other '*hommes marquans*,' and mine was this: — 'Whatever Sheridan has done or chosen to do has been, *par excellence*, always the *best* of its kind. He has written the *best* comedy (School for Scandal), the *best* opera (The Duenna — in my mind far before that St. Giles's lampoon, The Beggar's Opera), the *best* farce (The Critic — it is only too good for an after-piece), and the *best* Address (Monologue on Garrick), — and, to crown all, delivered the very *best* oration (the famous Begum Speech) ever conceived or heard in this country.' Somebody told Sheridan this the next day, and, on hearing it, he burst into tears! — Poor Brinsley! If they were tears of pleasure, I would rather have said those few, but sincere, words, than have written The Iliad, or made his own celebrated Philippic. Nay, his own comedy never gratified me more than to hear that he had derived a moment's gratification from any praise of mine — humble as it must appear to 'my elders and my betters.'"

The distresses of Sheridan now increased every day, and through the short remainder of his life it is a melancholy task to follow him. The sum

arising from the sale of his theatrical property was soon exhausted by the various claims upon it, and he was driven to part with all that he most valued, to satisfy further demands and provide for the subsistence of the day. Those books which, as I have already mentioned, were presented to him by various friends, now stood, in their splendid bindings, on the shelves of the pawnbroker.* The handsome cup, given him by the electors of Stafford, shared the same fate. Three or four fine pictures by Gainsborough, and one by Morland, were sold for little more than five hundred pounds †; and even the precious

* In most of them, too, were the names of the givers. The delicacy with which Mr. Harrison of Wardour Street (the pawnbroker with whom the books and the cup were deposited) behaved, after the death of Mr. Sheridan, deserves to be mentioned with praise. Instead of availing himself of the public feeling at that moment, by submitting these precious relics to the competition of a sale, he privately communicated to the family and one or two friends of Sheridan the circumstance of his having such articles in his hands, and demanded nothing more than the sum regularly due on them. — The Stafford cup is in the possession of Mr. Charles Sheridan.

† In the following extract from a note to his solicitor, he refers to these pictures: —

"DEAR BURGESS,

"I am perfectly satisfied with your account; — nothing can be more clear or fair, or more disinterested on your part; — but I must grieve to think that five or six hundred pounds for my poor pictures are added to the expenditure. However, we shall come through!"

CHAP. XXI.

1814–15.

portrait of his first wife *, by Reynolds, though not actually sold during his life, vanished away from his eyes into other hands.

One of the most humiliating trials of his pride was yet to come. In the spring of this year he was arrested and carried to a spunging-house, where he remained two or three days. This abode, from which the following painful letter to Whitbread was written, formed a sad contrast to those Princely halls, of which he had so lately been the most brilliant and favoured guest, and which were possibly, at that very moment, lighted up and crowded with gay company, unmindful of him within those prison walls: —

"Tooke's Court, Cursitor Street, Thursday, past two.

"I have done every thing in my power with the solicitors, White and Founes, to obtain my release, by substituting a better security for them than their detaining me — but in vain.

"Whitbread, putting all false professions of friendship and feeling out of the question, you have no right to keep me here! — for it is in truth *your* act — if you had not forcibly withheld from me the *twelve thousand pounds*, in

* As Saint Cecilia. The portrait of Mrs. Sheridan at Knowle, though less ideal than that of Sir Joshua, is (for this very reason, perhaps, as bearing a closer resemblance to the original,) still more beautiful.

consequence of a threatening letter from a miserable swindler, whose claim YOU in particular knew to *be a lie*, I should at least have been out of the reach of *this* state of miserable insult — for that, and that only lost me my seat in Parliament. And I assert that you cannot find a lawyer in the land, that is not either a natural-born fool or a corrupted scoundrel, who will not declare that your conduct in this respect was neither warrantable or legal — but let that pass *for the present*.

" Independently of the 1000*l.* ignorantly withheld from me on the day of considering my last claim, I require of you to answer the draft I send herewith on the part of the Committee, pledging myself to prove to them on the first day I can *personally* meet them, that there are still thousands and thousands due to me, both legally and equitably, from the Theatre. My word ought to be taken on this subject; and you may produce to them this document, if one among them could think that, under all the circumstances, your conduct required a justification. O God! with what mad confidence have I trusted *your word* — I ask *justice* from you, and *no boon*. I enclosed you yesterday three different securities, which, had you been disposed to have acted even as a private friend, would have made it *certain* that you might have done so *without the smallest*

CHAP. XXI.

1815.

risk. These you discreetly offered to put into the fire, when you found the object of your humane visit satisfied by seeing me safe in prison.

"I shall only add, that, I think, if I know myself, had our lots been reversed, and I had seen you in my situation, and had left Lady E. in that of my wife, I would have risked 600*l*. rather than have left you so — although I had been in no way accessary in bringing you into that condition.

"*S. Whitbread, Esq.* R. B. SHERIDAN."

Even in this situation the sanguineness of his disposition did not desert him; for he was found by Mr. Whitbread, on his visit to the spunging-house, confidently calculating on the representation for Westminster, in which the proceedings relative to Lord Cochrane at that moment promised a vacancy. On his return home, however, to Mrs. Sheridan, (some arrangements having been made by Whitbread for his release,) all his fortitude forsook him, and he burst into a long and passionate fit of weeping at the profanation, as he termed it, which his person had suffered.

He had for some months had a feeling that his life was near its close; and I find the following touching passage in a letter from him to Mrs. Sheridan, after one of those differences which

will sometimes occur between the most affectionate companions, and which, possibly, a remonstrance on his irregularities and want of care of himself occasioned: — "Never again let one harsh word pass between us, during the period, which may not perhaps be long, that we are in this world together, and life, however clouded to me, is mutually spared to us. I have expressed this same sentiment to my son, in a letter I wrote to him a few days since, and I had his answer — a most affecting one, and, I am sure, very sincere — and have since cordially embraced him. Don't imagine that I am expressing an interesting apprehension about myself which I do not feel."

Though the new Theatre of Drury Lane had now been three years built, his feelings had never allowed him to set his foot within its walls. About this time, however, he was persuaded by his friend, Lord Essex, to dine with him and go in the evening to his Lordship's box, to see Kean. Once there, the "*genius loci*" seems to have regained its influence over him; for, on missing him from the box, between the Acts, Lord Essex, who feared that he had left the house, hastened out to enquire, and, to his great satisfaction, found him installed in the Green-room, with all the actors around him, welcoming him back to the old region of his glory, with a sort

of filial cordiality. Wine was immediately ordered, and a bumper to the health of Mr. Sheridan was drank by all present, with the expression of many a hearty wish that he would often, very often, re-appear among them. This scene, as was natural, exhilarated his spirits, and, on parting with Lord Essex that night, at his own door in Saville Row, he said triumphantly that the world would soon hear of him, for the Duke of Norfolk was about to bring him into Parliament. This, it appears, was actually the case; but Death stood near as he spoke. In a few days after, his last fatal illness began.

Amid all the distresses of these latter years of his life, he appears but rarely to have had recourse to pecuniary assistance from friends. Mr. Peter Moore, Mr. Ironmonger, and one or two others, who did more for the comfort of his decline than any of his high and noble associates, concur in stating that, except for such an occasional trifle as his coach-hire, he was by no means, as has been sometimes asserted, in the habit of borrowing. One instance, however, where he laid himself under this sort of obligation, deserves to be mentioned. Soon after the return of Mr. Canning from Lisbon, a letter was put into his hands, in the House of Commons, which proved to be a request from his old friend Sheridan, then lying ill in bed, that he would

oblige him with the loan of a hundred pounds. It is unnecessary to say that the request was promptly and feelingly complied with; — and if the pupil has ever regretted leaving the politics of his master, it was not at *that* moment, at least, such a feeling was likely to present itself.

There are, in the possession of a friend of Sheridan, copies of a correspondence in which he was engaged this year with two Noble Lords and the confidential agent of an illustrious Personage, upon a subject, as it appears, of the utmost delicacy and importance. The letters of Sheridan, it is said (for I have not seen them,) though of too secret and confidential a nature to meet the public eye, not only prove the great confidence reposed in him by the parties concerned, but show the clearness and manliness of mind which he could still command, under the pressure of all that was most trying to human intellect.

The disorder, with which he was now attacked, arose from a diseased state of the stomach, brought on partly by irregular living, and partly by the harassing anxieties that had, for so many years, without intermission beset him. His powers of digestion grew every day worse, till he was at length unable to retain any sustenance. Notwithstanding this, however, his strength seemed to be but little broken, and his pulse remained, for some time, strong and regular.

CHAP. XXI.

1816.

Had he taken, indeed, but ordinary care of himself through life, the robust conformation of his frame, and particularly, as I have heard his physician remark, the peculiar width and capaciousness of his chest, seemed to mark him out for a long course of healthy existence. In general Nature appears to have a prodigal delight in enclosing her costliest essences in the most frail and perishable vessels: — but Sheridan was a signal exception to this remark; for, with a spirit so "finely touched," he combined all the robustness of the most uninspired clay.

Mr. Sheridan was, at first, not aware of his danger; but Dr. Bain — whose skill was now, as it ever had been, disinterestedly at the service of his friend*, — thought it right to commu-

* A letter from Sheridan to this amiable man, (of which I know not the date,) written in reference to a caution which he had given Mrs. Sheridan, against sleeping in the same bed with a lady who was consumptive, expresses feelings creditable alike to the writer and his physician: —

"My dear Sir, July 31.

"The caution you recommend proceeds from that attentive kindness which Hester always receives from you, and upon which I place the greatest reliance for her safety. I so entirely agree with your apprehensions on the subject, that I think it was very giddy in me not to have been struck with them when she first mentioned having slept with her friend. Nothing can abate my love for her; and the manner in which you apply the interest you take in her happiness, and direct the influence you possess in her mind, render you, beyond

nicate to her the apprehensions that he felt. From that moment, her attentions to the sufferer never ceased day or night; and, though drooping herself with an illness that did not leave her long behind him, she watched over his every word and wish, with unremitting anxiety, to the last.

Connected, no doubt, with the disorganisation of his stomach was an abscess, from which, though distressingly situated, he does not appear to have suffered much pain. In the spring of this year, however, he was obliged to confine himself, almost entirely, to his bed. Being expected to attend the St. Patrick's Dinner, on the 17th of March, he wrote a letter to the Duke of Kent, who was President, alleging severe indisposition as the cause of his absence. The contents of this letter were communicated to the company, and produced, as appears by the

---

comparison, the person I feel most obliged to upon earth. I take this opportunity of saying this upon paper, because it is a subject on which I always find it difficult to speak.

"With respect to that part of your note in which you express such friendly partiality, as to my parliamentary conduct, I need not add that there is no man whose good opinion can be more flattering to me.

"I am, ever, my dear Bain,

"Your sincere and obliged,

"R. B. SHERIDAN."

CHAP. XXI. 1816.

following note from the Duke of Kent, a strong sensation: —

"Kensington Palace, March 27. 1816.

"MY DEAR SHERIDAN,

"I have been so hurried ever since St. Patrick's day, as to be unable earlier to thank you for your kind letter, which I received while presiding at the festive board; but I can assure you, I was not unmindful of it *then*, but announced the afflicting cause of your absence to the company, who expressed, in a manner that could not be *misunderstood*, their continued affection for the writer of it. It now only remains for me to assure you, that I appreciate as I ought the sentiments of attachment it contains for me, and which will ever be most cordially returned by him, who is with the most friendly regard, my dear Sheridan,

"Yours faithfully,

"*The Right Hon. R. B. Sheridan.* EDWARD."

The following letter to him at this time from his elder sister will be read with interest: —

"MY DEAR BROTHER, Dublin, May 9. 1816.

"I am very, very sorry you are ill; but I trust in God your naturally strong constitution will retrieve all, and that I shall soon have the satis-

faction of hearing that you are in a fair way of recovery. I well know the nature of your complaint, that it is extremely painful, but if properly treated, and no doubt you have the best advice, not dangerous. I know a lady now past seventy-four, who many years since was attacked with a similar complaint, and is now as well as most persons of her time of life. Where poulticing is necessary, I have known oatmeal used with the best effect. Forgive, dear brother, this officious zeal. Your son Thomas told me he felt obliged to me for not prescribing for him. I did not, because in his case I thought it would be ineffectual; in yours I have reason to hope the contrary. I am very glad to hear of the good effect change of climate has made in him: — I took a great liking to him; there was something kind in his manner that won upon my affections. Of your son Charles I hear the most delightful accounts: — that he has an excellent and cultivated understanding, and a heart as good. May he be a blessing to you, and a compensation for much you have endured! That I do not know him, that I have not seen you, (so early and so long the object of my affection,) for so many years, has not been my fault; but I have ever considered it as a drawback upon a situation not otherwise unfortunate; for, to use the words of Goldsmith, I have endeavoured to

CHAP. XXI. 1816.

" draw upon content for the deficiencies of fortune;" and truly I have had some employment in that way, for considerable have been our worldly disappointments. But those are not the worst evils of life, and we have good children, which is its first blessing. I have often told you my son Tom bore a strong resemblance to you, when I loved you preferably to any thing the world contained. This, which was the case with him in childhood and early youth, is still so in mature years. In character of mind, too, he is very like you, though education and situation have made a great difference. At that period of existence, when the temper, morals, and propensities are formed, Tom had a mother who watched over his health, his well-being, and every part of education in which a female could be useful. *You* had lost a mother who would have cherished you, whose talents you inherited, who would have softened the asperity of our father's temper, and probably have prevented his unaccountable partialities. You have always shown a noble independence of spirit, that the pecuniary difficulties you often had to encounter could not induce you to forego. As a public man, you have been, like the motto of the Lefanu family, '*Sine macula;*' and I am persuaded had you not too early been thrown upon the world, and alienated from your family, you

would have been equally good as a private character. My son is eminently so. * * * *

"Do, dear brother, send me one line to tell me you are better, and believe me, most affec tionately,

"Yours,

"ALICIA LEFANU."

While death was thus gaining fast on Sheridan, the miseries of his life were thickening round him also; nor did the last corner, in which he now lay down to die, afford him any asylum from the clamours of his legal pursuers. Writs and executions came in rapid succession, and bailiffs at length gained possession of his house. It was about the beginging of May that Lord Holland, on being informed by Mr. Rogers (who was one of the very few that watched the going out of this great light with interest) of the dreary situation in which his old friend was lying, paid him a visit one evening, in company with Mr. Rogers, and by the cordiality, suavity, and cheerfulness of his conversation, shed a charm round that chamber of sickness, which, perhaps, no other voice but his own could have imparted.

Sheridan was, I believe, sincerely attached to Lord Holland, in whom he saw transmitted the same fine qualities, both of mind and heart,

CHAP. XXI. 1816.

which, notwithstanding occasional appearances to the contrary, he had never ceased to love and admire in his great relative; — the same ardour for Right and impatience of Wrong — the same mixture of wisdom and simplicity, so tempering each other, as to make the simplicity refined and the wisdom unaffected — the same gentle magnanimity of spirit, intolerant only of tyranny and injustice — and, in addition to all this, a range and vivacity of conversation, entirely his own, which leaves no subject untouched or unadorned, but is (to borrow a fancy of Dryden) "as the Morning of the Mind," bringing new objects and images successively into view, and scattering its own fresh light over all. Such a visit, therefore, could not fail to be soothing and gratifying to Sheridan; and, on parting, both Lord Holland and Mr. Rogers comforted him with the assurance, that some steps should be taken to ward off the immediate evils that he dreaded.

An evening or two after (Wednesday, May 15.) I was with Mr. Rogers, when, on returning home, he found the following afflicting note upon his table: —

"Saville Row.

"I find things settled so that 150*l.* will remove all difficulty. I am absolutely undone and broken-hearted. I shall negotiate for the Plays

successfully in the course of a week, when all shall be returned. I have desired Fairbrother to get back the Guarantee for thirty.

"They are going to put the carpets out of window, and break into Mrs. S.'s room and *take me* — for God's sake let me see you.

"R. B. S."

It was too late to do any thing when this note was received, being then between twelve and one at night; but Mr. Rogers and I walked down to Saville Row together, to assure ourselves that the threatened arrest had not yet been put in execution. A servant spoke to us out of the area, and said that all was safe for the night, but that it was intended, in pursuance of this new proceeding, to paste bills over the front of the house next day.

On the following morning I was early with Mr. Rogers, and willingly undertook to be the bearer of a draft for 150*l.* * to Saville Row. I found Mr. Sheridan good-natured and cordial as ever; and, though he was then within a few weeks of his death, his voice had not lost its fulness or strength, nor was that lustre, for which

* Lord Holland afterwards insisted upon paying the half of this sum, — which was not the first of the same amount that my liberal friend, Mr. Rogers, had advanced for Sheridan.

CHAP. XXI.

1816.

his eyes were so remarkable, diminished. He showed, too, his usual sanguineness of disposition in speaking of the price that he expected for his Dramatic Works, and of the certainty he felt of being able to arrange all his affairs, if his complaint would but suffer him to leave his bed.

In the following month, his powers began rapidly to fail him;—his stomach was completely worn out, and could no longer bear any kind of sustenance. During the whole of this time, as far as I can learn, it does not appear that (with the exceptions I have mentioned) any one of his Noble or Royal friends ever called at his door, or even sent to enquire after him!

About this period Doctor Bain received the following note from Mr. Vaughan:—

"My dear Sir,

"An apology in a case of humanity is scarcely necessary, besides I have the honor of a slight acquaintance with you. A friend of mine, hearing of *our friend* Sheridan's forlorn situation, and that he has neither money or credit for a few comforts, has employed me to convey a small sum for his use, through such channel as I think right. I can devise none better than through you. If had had the good fortune to have seen you, I should have left for this purpose a draft for 50*l.* Perhaps as much more might be had if

it will be conducive to a good end — of course you must feel it is not for the purpose of satisfying troublesome people. I will say more to you if you will do me the honor of a call in your way to Saville Street to-morrow. I am a mere agent.

" I am, my dear Sir,
" Most truly yours,
" JOHN TAYLOR VAUGHAN.

" 23. Grafton Street.

" If I should not see you before twelve, I will come through the passage to you."

In his interview with Doctor Bain, Mr. Vaughan stated, that the sum thus placed at his disposal was, in all, 200*l.**; and the proposition being submitted to Mrs. Sheridan, that lady, after consulting with some of her relatives, returned for answer that, as there was a sufficiency of means to provide all that was necessary for her husband's comfort, as well as her own, she begged leave to decline the offer.

Mr. Vaughan always said, that the donation, thus meant to be doled out, came from a Royal

* Mr. Vaughan did not give Doctor Bain to understand that he was authorised to go beyond the 200*l.*; but, in a conversation which I had with him a year or two after, in contemplation of this Memoir, he told me that a further supply was intended.

CHAP. XXI.

1816.

hand; — but this is hardly credible. It would be safer, perhaps, to let the suspicion rest upon that gentleman's memory, of having indulged his own benevolent disposition in this disguise, than to suppose it possible that so scanty and reluctant a benefaction was the sole mark of attention accorded by a "gracious Prince and Master*" to the last, death-bed wants of one of the most accomplished and faithful servants, that Royalty ever yet raised or ruined by its smiles. When the philosopher Anaxagoras lay dying for want of sustenance, his great pupil, Pericles, sent him a sum of money. "Take it back," said Anaxagoras — "if he wished to keep the lamp alive, he ought to have administered the oil before!"

In the mean time, the clamours and incursions of creditors increased. A sheriff's officer at length arrested the dying man in his bed, and was about to carry him off, in his blankets, to a spunging-house, when Doctor Bain interfered — and, by threatening the officer with the responsibility he must incur, if, as was but too probable, his prisoner should expire on the way, averted this outrage.

About the middle of June, the attention and sympathy of the Public were, for the first time,

* See Sheridan's Letter, p. 365.

awakened to the desolate situation of Sheridan, by an article that appeared in The Morning Post, — written, as I understand, by a gentleman, who, though on no very cordial terms with him, forgot every other feeling in a generous pity for his fate, and in honest indignation against those who now deserted him. "Oh delay not," said the writer, without naming the person to whom he alluded — "delay not to draw aside the curtain within which that proud spirit hides its sufferings." He then adds, with a striking anticipation of what afterwards happened: — "Prefer ministering in the chamber of sickness to mustering at

'The splendid sorrows that adorn the hearse;'

I say, *Life* and *Succour* against Westminster Abbey and a Funeral!"

This article produced a strong and general sensation, and was reprinted in the same paper the following day. Its effect, too, was soon visible in the calls made at Sheridan's door, and in the appearance of such names as the Duke of York, the Duke of Argyle, &c., among the visitors. But it was now too late; — the spirit, that these unavailing tributes might once have comforted, was now fast losing the consciousness of every thing earthly, but pain. After a succession of shivering fits, he fell into a state of exhaustion,

CHAP. XXI.

1816.

in which he continued, with but few more signs of suffering, till his death. A day or two before that event, the Bishop of London read prayers by his bed-side; and on Sunday, the seventh of July, in the sixty-fifth year of his age, he died.

On the following Saturday the Funeral took place; — his remains having been previously removed from Saville Row to the house of his friend, Mr. Peter Moore, in Great George Street, Westminster. From thence, at one o'clock, the procession moved on foot to the Abbey, where, in the only spot in Poet's Corner that remained unoccupied, the body was interred; and the following simple inscription marks its resting-place: —

"RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN,
BORN, 1751.
DIED, 7th JULY, 1816.
THIS MARBLE IS THE TRIBUTE OF AN ATTACHED FRIEND,
PETER MOORE."

Seldom has there been such an array of rank as graced this Funeral.* The Pall-bearers were

* It was well remarked by a French Journal, in contrasting the penury of Sheridan's latter years with the splendor of his Funeral, that "France is the place for a man of letters to live in, and England the place for him to die in."

the Duke of Bedford, the Earl of Lauderdale, Earl Mulgrave, the Lord Bishop of London, Lord Holland, and Lord Spencer. Among the mourners were His Royal Highness the Duke of York, His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex, the Duke of Argyle, the Marquisses of Anglesea and Tavistock; the Earls of Thanet, Jersey, Harrington, Besborough, Mexborough, Rosslyn, and Yarmouth; Lords George Cavendish and Robert Spencer; Viscounts Sidmouth, Granville, and Duncannon; Lords Rivers, Erskine, and Lynedoch; the Lord Mayor; Right Hon. G. Canning and W. W. Pole, &c. &c. *

Where were they all, these Royal and Noble persons, who now crowded to "partake the gale" of Sheridan's glory; where were they all, while any life remained in him? Where were they all but a few weeks before, when their interposition might have saved his heart from breaking, — or when the zeal, now wasted on the grave, might have soothed and comforted the death-bed? This is a subject on which it is difficult to speak with patience. If the man was

* In the train of all this phalanx of Dukes, Marquisses, Earls, Viscounts, Barons, Honourables, and Right Honourables, Princes of the Blood Royal, and First Officers of the State, it was not a little interesting to see, walking humbly, side by side, the only two men whose friendship had not waited for the call of vanity to display itself — Dr. Bain and Mr. Rogers.

CHAP. XXI.

1816.

unworthy of the commonest offices of humanity while he lived, why all this parade of regret and homage over his tomb?

There appeared some verses at the time, which, however intemperate in their satire and careless in their style, came, evidently, warm from the heart of the writer, and contained sentiments to which, even in his cooler moments, he needs not hesitate to subscribe; —

" Oh it sickens the heart to see bosoms so hollow,
And friendships so false in the great and high-born; —
To think what a long line of Titles may follow
The relics of him who died, friendless and lorn!

" How proud they can press to the funeral array
Of him whom they shunn'd, in his sickness and sorrow—
How bailiffs may seize his last blanket to-day,
Whose pall shall be held up by Nobles to-morrow!"

The anonymous writer thus characterises the talents of Sheridan: —

" Was this then the fate of that high-gifted man,
The pride of the palace, the bower, and the hall —
The orator, dramatist, minstrel, — who ran
Through each mode of the lyre, and was master of all?

" Whose mind was an essence, compounded with art,
From the finest and best of all other men's powers; —
Who rul'd, like a wizard, the world of the heart,
And could call up its sunshine, or draw down its showers; —

" Whose humour, as gay as the fire-fly's light,
Play'd round every subject, and shone, as it play'd;—
Whose wit, in the combat as gentle as bright,
Ne'er carried a heart-stain away on its blade;—

" Whose eloquence, brightening whatever it tried,
Whether reason or fancy, the gay or the grave,
Was as rapid, as deep, and as brilliant a tide,
As ever bore Freedom aloft on its wave! "

Though a perusal of the foregoing pages has, I trust, sufficiently furnished the reader with materials out of which to form his own estimate of the character of Sheridan, a few general remarks may, at parting, be allowed me — rather with a view to convey the impressions left upon myself, than with any presumptuous hope of influencing the deductions of others.

In considering the intellectual powers of this extraordinary man, the circumstance that first strikes us is the very scanty foundation of instruction, upon which he contrived to raise himself to such eminence both as a writer and a politician. It is true, in the line of authorship he pursued, erudition was not so much wanting; and his wit, like the laurel of Cæsar, was leafy enough to hide any bareness in this respect. In politics, too, he had the advantage of entering

CHAP. XXI.

1816.

upon his career, at a time when habits of business and a knowledge of details were less looked for in public men than they are at present, and when the House of Commons was, for various reasons, a more open play-ground for eloquence and wit. The great increase of public business, since then, has necessarily made a considerable change in this respect. Not only has the time of the Legislature become too precious to be wasted upon the mere gymnastics of rhetoric, but even those graces, with which true Oratory surrounds her statements, are but impatiently borne, where the statement itself is the primary and pressing object of the hearer.* Burke, we know, was,

* The new light that has been thrown on Political Science may also, perhaps, be assigned as a reason for this evident revolution in Parliamentary taste. "Truth," says Lord Bacon, "is a naked and open daylight, that doth not show the masques, and mummeries, and triumphs of the present world half so stately and daintily as candle-lights;" and there can be little doubt that the clearer any important truths are made, the less controversy they will excite among fair and rational men, and the less passion and fancy, accordingly, can eloquence infuse into the discussion of them. Mathematics have produced no quarrels among mankind — it is by the mysterious and the vague, that temper as well as imagination is most roused. In proof of this, while the acknowledged clearness, almost to truism, which the leading principles of Political Science have attained, has tended to simplify and tame down the activities of eloquence on that subject, there is still another arena left, in the science of the Law, where the same illumination of truth has not yet

even for his own time, too much addicted to what falconers would call *raking*, or flying wide of his game; but there was hardly, perhaps, one among his great contemporaries, who, if beginning his career at present, would not find it, in some degree, necessary to conform his style to the taste for business and matter-of-fact that is prevalent. Mr. Pitt would be compelled to curtail the march of his sentences — Mr. Fox would learn to repeat himself less lavishly — nor would Mr. Sheridan venture to enliven a question of evidence by a long and pathetic appeal to Filial Piety.

In addition to this change in the character and taste of the House of Commons, which, while it has lowered the value of some of the qualifications possessed by Sheridan, has created a demand for others of a more useful but less splendid kind, which his education and habits of life would have rendered less easily attainable by him, we must take also into account the prodigious difference produced by the general movement, at present, of the whole civilised world towards knowledge; — a movement, which no

penetrated, and where Oratory will still continue to work her perplexing spells, till Common Sense and the plain principles of Utility shall find their way there also to weaken them.

public man, however great his natural talents, could now lag behind with impunity, and which requires nothing less than the versatile and *encyclopædic* powers of a Brougham to keep pace with it.

Another striking characteristic of Sheridan, as an orator and a writer, was the great degree of labour and preparation which his productions in both lines cost him. Of this the reader has seen some curious proofs in the preceding pages. Though the papers left behind by him have added nothing to the stock of his *chef-d'œuvres*, they have given us an insight into his manner of producing his great works, which is, perhaps, the next most interesting thing to the works themselves. Though no new star has been discovered, the history of the formation of those we already possess, and of the gradual process by which they were brought "firm to retain their gathered beams," has, as in the instance of The School for Scandal, been most interestingly unfolded to us.

The same marks of labour are discoverable throughout the whole of his Parliamentary career. He never made a speech of any moment, of which the sketch, more or less detailed, has not been found among his papers — with the showier passages generally written two or three times over (often without any material change in their

form) upon small detached pieces of paper, or on cards. To such minutiæ of effect did he attend, that I have found, in more than one instance, a memorandum made of the precise place in which the words "Good God, Mr. Speaker," were to be introduced. These preparatory sketches are continued down to his latest displays; and it is observable that when, from the increased derangement of his affairs, he had no longer leisure or collectedness enough to prepare, he ceased to speak.

The only time he could have found for this pre-arrangement of his thoughts (of which few, from the apparent idleness of his life, suspected him) must have been during the many hours of the day that he remained in bed, — when, frequently, while the world gave him credit for being asleep, he was employed in laying the frame-work of his wit and eloquence for the evening.

That this habit of premeditation was not altogether owing to a want of quickness appears from the power and liveliness of his replies in Parliament, and the vivacity of some of his retorts in conversation.* The labour, indeed,

* His best *bon-mots* are in the memory of every one. Among those less known, perhaps, is his answer to General T——, relative to some difference of opinion between them on the War in Spain: — "Well, T——, are you still on

which he found necessary for his public displays was, in a great degree, the combined effect of his ignorance and his taste; — the one rendering him fearful of committing himself on the *matter* of his task, and the other making him fastidious and hesitating as to the *manner* of it. I cannot help thinking, however, that there must have been, also, a degree of natural slowness in the first movements of his mind upon any topic; and that, like those animals which remain gazing upon their prey before they seize it, he found it necessary to look intently at his subject for some time, before he was able to make the last, quick spring that mastered it.

---

your high horse?" — "If I was on a horse before, I am upon an elephant now." — "No, T——, you were upon an *ass* before, and now you are upon a *mule*."

Some mention having been made in his presence of a Tax upon mile-stones, Sheridan said, "Such a tax would be unconstitutional; as they were a race that could not *meet* to remonstrate."

As an instance of his humour, I have been told that, in some country-house where he was on a visit, an elderly maiden lady having set her heart on being his companion in a walk, he excused himself on account of the badness of the weather. Soon afterwards, however, the lady intercepted him in an attempt to escape without her: — "Well," she said, "it has cleared up, I see." — "Why, yes," he answered, "it has cleared up enough for *one*, but not for *two*."

Among the proofs of this dependence of his fancy upon time and thought for its developement, may be mentioned his familiar letters, as far as their fewness enables us to judge. Had his wit been a "fruit, that would fall without shaking," we should, in these communications at least, find some casual windfalls of it. But, from the want of sufficient time to search and cull, he seems to have given up, in despair, all thoughts of being lively in his letters; and, accordingly, as the reader must have observed in the specimens that have been given, his compositions in this way are not only unenlivened by any excursions beyond the bounds of mere matter of fact, but, from the habit or necessity of taking a certain portion of time for correction, are singularly confused, disjointed, and inelegant in their style.

It is certain that even his *bon-mots* in society were not always to be set down to the credit of the occasion; but that frequently, like skilful priests, he prepared the miracle of the moment before-hand. Nothing, indeed, could be more remarkable than the patience and tact, with which he would wait through a whole evening for the exact moment, when the shaft, which he had ready feathered, might be let fly with effect. There was no effort, either obvious or disguised, to lead to the subject — no "question detached (as he himself expresses it) to draw you into

the ambuscade of his ready-made joke;"—and, when the lucky moment *did* arrive, the natural and accidental manner, in which he would let this treasured sentence fall from his lips, considerably added to the astonishment and the charm. So bright a thing, produced so easily, seemed like the delivery of Wieland's * Amanda in a dream;—and his own apparent unconsciousness of the value of what he said might have deceived dull people into the idea that there was really nothing in it.

The consequence of this practice of waiting for the moment of effect was (as all, who have been much in his society, must have observed,) that he would remain inert in conversation, and even taciturn, for hours, and then suddenly come out with some brilliant sally, which threw a light over the whole evening, and was carried away in the memories of all present. Nor must it be supposed that in the intervals, either before or after these flashes, he ceased to be agreeable; on the contrary, he had a grace and good nature in his manner, which gave a charm to even his most ordinary sayings,—and there was, besides, that ever-speaking lustre in his eye, which made it impossible, even when he was silent, to forget who he was.

* See Sotheby's admirable Translation of Oberon, Canto 9.

A curious instance of the care with which he treasured up the felicities of his wit appears in the use he made of one of those epigrammatic passages, which the reader may remember among the memorandums for his Comedy of Affectation, and which, in its first form, ran thus: — "He certainly has a great deal of fancy, and a very good memory; but, with a perverse ingenuity, he employs these qualities as no other person does — for he employs his fancy in his narratives, and keeps his recollection for his wit: — when he makes his jokes, you applaud the accuracy of his memory, and 'tis only when he states his facts that you admire the flights of his imagination." After many efforts to express this thought more concisely, and to reduce the language of it to that condensed and elastic state, in which alone it gives force to the projectiles of wit, he kept the passage by him patiently some years, — till he at length found an opportunity of turning it to account, in a reply, I believe, to Mr. Dundas, in the House of Commons, when, with the most extemporaneous air, he brought it forth, in the following compact and pointed form: — "The Right Honourable Gentleman is indebted to his memory for his jests, and to his imagination for his facts."

His Political Character stands out so fully

CHAP. XXI.

in these pages, that it is needless, by any comments, to attempt to raise it into stronger relief. If to watch over the Rights of the Subject, and guard them against the encroachments of Power, be, even in safe and ordinary times, a task full of usefulness and honour, how much more glorious to have stood sentinel over the same sacred trust, through a period so trying as that with which Sheridan had to struggle — when Liberty itself had become suspected and unpopular — when Authority had succeeded in identifying patriotism with treason, and when the few remaining and deserted friends of Freedom were reduced to take their stand on a narrowing isthmus, between Anarchy on one side and the angry incursions of Power on the other. How manfully he maintained his ground in a position so critical, the annals of England and of the Champions of her Constitution will long testify. The truly national spirit, too, with which, when that struggle was past, and the dangers to liberty from without seemed greater than any from within, he forgot all past differences in the one common cause of Englishmen, and, while others "gave but the *left* hand to the Country *," proffered her *both* of his, stamped a seal of sincerity on his public conduct, which, in the

* His own words.

eyes of all England, authenticated it as genuine patriotism.

To his own party, it is true, his conduct presented a very different phasis; and if implicit partisanship were the sole merit of a public man, his movements, at this and other junctures, were far too independent and unharnessed to lay claim to it. But, however useful may be the bond of Party, there are occasions that supersede it; and, in all such deviations from the fidelity which it enjoins, the two questions to be asked are — Were they, as regarded the Public, right? Were they, as regarded the individual himself, unpurchased? To the former question, in the instance of Sheridan, the whole country responded in the affirmative; and to the latter, his account with the Treasury, from first to last, is a sufficient answer.

Even, however, on the score of fidelity to Party, when we recollect that he more than once submitted to some of the worst martyrdoms which it imposes — that of sharing in the responsibility of opinions from which he dissented, and suffering by the ill consequences of measures against which he had protested; — when we call to mind, too, that during the Administration of Mr. Addington, though agreeing wholly with the Ministry and differing with the Whigs, he even then refused to profit by a position so

favourable to his interests, and submitted, like certain religionists, from a point of honour, to suffer for a faith in which he did not believe; — it seems impossible not to concede that even to the obligations of Party he was as faithful as could be expected from a spirit that so far outgrew its limits; and, in paying the tax of fidelity while he asserted the freedom of dissent, showed that he could sacrifice every thing to it, except his opinion. Through all these occasional variations, too, he remained a genuine Whig to the last; and, as I have heard one of his own party happily express it, was, "like pure gold, that changes colour in the fire, but comes out unaltered."

The transaction in 1812, relative to the Household, was, as I have already said, the least defensible part of his public life. But it should be recollected how broken he was, both in mind and body, at that period; — his resources from the Theatre at an end, — the shelter of Parliament about to be taken from over his head also, — and old age and sickness coming on, as every hope and comfort vanished. In that wreck of all around him, the friendship of Carlton-House was the last asylum left to his pride and his hope; and that even character itself should, in a too zealous moment, have been one of the sacri-

fices offered up at the shrine that protected him, is a subject more of deep regret than of wonder. The poet Cowley, in speaking of the unproductivenes of those pursuits connected with Wit and Fancy, says beautifully —

> " Where such fairies once have danc'd, no grass will ever grow;"

but, unfortunately, thorns *will* grow there; — and he who walks unsteadily among such thorns as now beset the once enchanted path of Sheridan, ought not, after all, to be very severely criticised.

His social qualities were, unluckily for himself, but too attractive. In addition to his powers of conversation, there was a well-bred good-nature in his manner, as well as a deference to the remarks and opinions of others, the want of which very often, in distinguished wits, offends the self-love of their hearers, and makes even the dues of admiration that they levy a sort of " *Droit de Seigneur*," paid with unwillingness and distaste.

No one was so ready and cheerful in promoting the amusements of a country-house; and on a rural excursion he was always the soul of the party. His talent at dressing a little dish was often put in requisition on such occasions, and

an Irish stew was that on which he particularly plumed himself. Some friends of his recall with delight a day of this kind which they passed with him, when he made the whole party act over the Battle of the Pyramids on Marsden Moor, and ordered "Captain" Creevey and others upon various services, against the cows and donkeys entrenched in the ditches. Being of so playful a disposition himself, it was not wonderful that he should take such pleasure in the society of children. I have been told, as doubly characteristic of him, that he has often, at Mr. Monckton's, kept a chaise and four waiting half the day for him at the door, while he romped with the children.

In what are called *Vers de Société*, or drawing-room verses, he took great delight; and there remain among his papers several sketches of these trifles. I once heard him repeat, in a ball-room, some verses which he had lately written on Waltzing, and of which I remember the following: —

"With tranquil step, and timid downcast glance,
Behold the well-pair'd couple now advance.
In such sweet posture our first Parents mov'd,
While, hand in hand, through Eden's bowers they rov'd;
Ere yet the Devil, with promise foul and false,
Turn'd their poor heads and taught them how to *Walse*.

One hand grasps hers, the other holds her hip —
* * * * *
For so the Law's laid down by Baron Trip." †

He had a sort of hereditary fancy for difficult trifling in poetry; — particularly for that sort, which consists in rhyming to the same word through a long string of couplets, till every rhyme that the language supplies for it is exhausted.‡ The following are specimens from a poem of this kind, which he wrote on the loss of a lady's trunk: —

"My Trunk!

"(*To Anne.*)

"Have you heard, my dear Anne, how my spirits are sunk?
Have you heard of the cause? Oh, the loss of my *Trunk!*
From exertion or firmness I've never yet slunk;
But my fortitude's gone with the loss of my *Trunk!*
Stout Lucy, my maid, is a damsel of spunk;
Yet she weeps night and day for the loss of my *Trunk!*
I'd better turn nun, and coquet with a monk;
For with whom can I flirt without aid from my *Trunk?*
* * * * *

† This gentleman, whose name suits so aptly as a legal authority on the subject of Waltzing, was, at the time these verses were written, well known in the dancing circles.

‡ Some verses by General Fitzpatrick on Lord Holland's father are the best specimen that I know of this sort of *Scherzo.*

Accurs'd be the thief, the old rascally hunks,
Who rifles the fair, and lays hands on their *Trunks!*
He, who robs the King's stores of the least bit of junk,
Is hang'd—while he's safe, who has plunder'd my *Trunk!*
* * * * *
There's a phrase amongst lawyers, when *nunc*'s put for *tunc;*
But tunc and nunc both, must I grieve for my *Trunk!*
Huge leaves of that great commentator, old Brunck,
Perhaps was the paper that lin'd my poor *Trunk!*
But my rhymes are all out!—for I dare not use st—k;†
'Twould shock Sheridan more than the loss of my *Trunk!*"

From another of these trifles (which, no doubt, produced much gaiety at the breakfast-table,) the following extracts will be sufficient:—

"Muse, assist me to complain,
While I grieve for Lady *Jane.*
I ne'er was in so sad a vein,
Deserted now by Lady *Jane.*
* * *
Lord Petre's house was built by Payne—
No mortal architect made *Jane.*
If hearts had windows, through the pane
Of mine you'd see sweet Lady *Jane.*
* * * *
At breakfast I could scarce refrain
From tears at missing lovely *Jane;*
Nine rolls I eat, in hopes to gain
The roll that might have fall'n to *Jane,*" &c.

† He had a particular horror of this word.

Another, written on a Mr. *Bigg*, contains some ludicrous couplets: —

" I own he's not fam'd for a reel or a jig,
Tom Sheridan there surpasses Tom *Bigg*.
For, lam'd in one thigh, he is obliged to go zig-
Zag, like a crab — so no dancer is *Bigg*.
Those who think him a coxcomb, or call him a prig,
How little they know of the mind of my *Bigg!*
Tho' he ne'er can be mine, Hope will catch a twig —
Two Deaths — and I yet may become Mrs. *Bigg*.
Oh give me, with him, but a cottage and pig,
And content I would live on Beans, Bacon, and *Bigg*."

A few more of these light productions remain among his papers, but their wit is gone with those for whom they were written; — the wings of Time " eripuere *jocos*."

Of a very different description are the following striking and spirited fragments, (which ought, perhaps, to have been introduced in a former part of this work,) written by him, apparently, about the year 1794, and addressed to Lord Howe and the other Naval heroes of that period, to console them for the neglect they experienced from the Government, while ribands and titles were lavished on the Whig Seceders: —

" Never mind them, brave black Dick,
Though they've played thee such a trick —
Damn their ribands and their garters,
Get you to your post and quarters.

Look upon the azure sea,
There's a Sailor's Taffety!
Mark the Zodiac's radiant bow,
That's a collar fit for HOWE! —
And, than P—tl—d's brighter far,
The Pole shall furnish you a Star? †
Damn their ribands and their garters,
Get you to your post and quarters.
Think, on what things are ribands shower'd —
The two Sir Georges — Y—— and H——!
Look to what rubbish Stars will stick,
To Dicky H——n and Johnny D——k!
Would it be for your country's good,
That you might pass for Alec. H——d,
Or, perhaps, — and worse by half —
To be mistaken for Sir R——h!
Would you, like C——, pine with spleen,
Because your bit of silk was green?
Would you, like C——, change your side,
To have your silk new dipt and dyed? —
Like him exclaim, 'My riband's hue
Was green — and now, by Heav'ns! 'tis blue,'
And, like him — stain your honour too!
Damn their ribands and their garters,
Get you to your post and quarters.
On the foes of Britain close,
While B——k garters his Dutch hose,
And cons, with spectacles on nose,
(While to battle *you* advance,)
His '*Honi soit qui mal y pense.*'"

* * * *

† This reminds me of a happy application which he made, upon a subsequent occasion, of two lines of Dryden: —

"When men like Erskine go astray,
The stars are more in fault than they."

It has been seen, by a letter of his sister already given, that, when young, he was generally accounted handsome; but, in later years, his eyes were the only testimonials of beauty that remained to him. It was, indeed, in the upper part of his face that the Spirit of the man chiefly reigned; — the dominion of the world and the Senses being rather strongly marked out in the lower. In his person, he was above the middle size, and his general make was, as I have already said, robust and well proportioned. It is remarkable that his arms, though of powerful strength, were thin, and appeared by no means muscular. His hands were small and delicate; and the following couplet, written on a cast from one of them, very livelily enumerates both its physical and moral qualities: —

> "Good at a Fight, but better at a Play,
> Godlike in Giving, but — the Devil to Pay!"

Among his habits, it may not be uninteresting to know that his hours of composition, as long as he continued to be an author, were at night, and that he required a profusion of lights around him while he wrote. Wine, too, was one of his favourite helps to inspiration; — "If the thought (he would say) is slow to come, a glass of good

wine encourages it, and, when it *does* come, a glass of good wine rewards it."

Having taken a cursory view of his Literary, Political, and Social qualities, it remains for me to say a few words upon that most important point of all, his Moral character.

There are few persons, as we have seen, to whose kind and affectionate conduct, in some of the most interesting relations of domestic life, so many strong and honourable testimonies remain. The pains he took to win back the estranged feelings of his father, and the filial tenderness with which he repaid long years of parental caprice, show a heart that had, at least, set out by the right road, however, in after years, it may have missed the way. The enthusiastic love which his sister bore him, and retained, unblighted by distance or neglect, is another proof of the influence of his amiable feelings, at that period of life when he was as yet unspoiled by the world. We have seen the romantic fondness which he preserved towards the first Mrs. Sheridan, even while doing his utmost, and in vain, to extinguish the same feeling in her. With the second wife, a course, nearly similar, was run ; — the same " scatterings and eclipses " of affection, from the irregularities and vanities, in which he continued to indulge, but the same

hold kept of each other's hearts to the last. Her early letters to him breathe a passion little short of idolatry, and her devoted attentions beside his death-bed showed that the essential part of the feeling still remained.

To claim an exemption for frailties and irregularities on the score of genius, while there are such names as Milton and Newton on record, were to be blind to the example which these and other great men have left, of the grandest intellectual powers combined with the most virtuous lives. But, for the bias given early to the mind by education and circumstances even the least charitable may be inclined to make allowances. We have seen how idly the young days of Sheridan were wasted — how soon he was left (in the words of the Prophet) "to dwell carelessly," and with what an undisciplined temperament he was thrown upon the world, to meet at every step that never-failing spring of temptation, which, like the fatal fountain in the Garden of Armida, sparkles up for ever in the pathway of such a man: —

"Un fonte sorge in lei, che vaghe e monde
Ha l' acque si, che i riguardanti asseta,
Ma dentro ai freddi suoi cristalli asconde
Di tosco estran malvagita secreta."

CHAP. XXI.

Even marriage, which is among the sedatives of other men's lives, but formed a part of the romance of his. The very attractions of his wife increased his danger, by doubling, as it were, the power of the world over him, and leading him astray by her light as well as by his own. Had his talents, even then, been subjected to the *manège* of a profession, there was still a chance that business, and the round of regularity which it requires, might have infused some spirit of order into his life. But the Stage—his glory and his ruin—opened upon him; and the property of which it made him master was exactly of that treacherous kind, which not only deceives a man himself, but enables him to deceive others, and thus combined all that a person of his carelessness and ambition had most to dread. An uncertain income, which, by eluding calculation, gives an excuse for improvidence *, and,

* How feelingly aware he was of this great source of all his misfortunes appears from a passage in the able speech which he delivered before the Chancellor, as Counsel in his own case, in the year 1799 or 1800: —

"It is a great disadvantage, relatively speaking, to any man, and especially to a very careless, and a very sanguine man, to have possessed an uncertain and fluctuating income. That disadvantage is greatly increased, if the person so circumstanced has conceived himself to be in some degree entitled to presume, that, by the exertion of his own talents, he may at pleasure increase that income — thereby becom-

still more fatal, a facility of raising money, by which the lesson, that the pressure of distress brings with it, is evaded till it comes too late to be of use—such was the dangerous power put into his hands, in his six-and-twentieth year, and amidst the intoxication of as deep and quick draughts of fame as ever young author quaffed. Scarcely had the zest of this excitement begun to wear off, when he was suddenly transported into another sphere, where success still more flattering to his vanity awaited him. Without any increase of means, he became the companion and friend of the first Nobles and Princes, and paid the usual tax of such unequal friendships, by, in the end, losing them and ruining himself. The vicissitudes of a political life,

ing induced to make promises to himself which he may afterwards fail to fulfil.

"Occasional excess and frequent unpunctuality will be the natural consequences of such a situation. But, my Lord, to exceed an ascertained and limited income, I hold to be a very different matter. In that situation I have placed myself, (not since the present unexpected contention arose, for since then I would have adopted no arrangements,) but months since, by my Deed of Trust to Mr. Adam, and in that situation I shall remain until every debt on earth, in which the Theatre or I am concerned, shall be fully and fairly discharged. Till then I will live on what remains to me—preserving that spirit of undaunted independence, which, both as a public and a private man, I trust, I have hitherto maintained."

and those deceitful vistas into office that were for ever opening on his party, made his hopes as fluctuating and uncertain as his means, and encouraged the same delusive calculations on both. He seemed, at every new turn of affairs, to be on the point of redeeming himself; and the confidence of others in his resources was no less fatal to him than his own, as it but increased the facilities of ruin that surrounded him.

Such a career as this—so shaped towards wrong, so inevitably devious—it is impossible to regard otherwise than with the most charitable allowances. It was one long paroxysm of excitement—no pause for thought—no inducements to prudence—the attractions all drawing the wrong way, and a Voice, like that which Bossuet describes, crying inexorably from behind him, "On, On!" * Instead of wondering at the wreck that followed all this, our only surprise should be, that so much remained uninjured through the trial,—that his natural good

* "La loi est prononcée; il faut avancer toujours. Je voudrois retourner sur mes pas; 'Marche, Marche!' Un poids invincible nous entraine; il faut sans cesse avancer vers le précipice. On se console pourtant, parce que de tems en tems on rencontre des objets qui nous divertissent, des eaux courantes, des fleurs qui passent. On voudroit arreter; 'Marche, Marche!'"—*Sermon sur la Resurrection.*

feelings should have struggled to the last with his habits, and his sense of all that was right in conduct so long survived his ability to practise it.

Numerous, however, as were the causes that concurred to disorganise his moral character, in his pecuniary embarrassment lay the source of those blemishes that discredited him most in the eyes of the world. He might have indulged his vanity and his passions, like others, with but little loss of reputation, if the consequence of these indulgences had not been obtruded upon observation, in the forbidding form of debts and distresses. So much did his friend Richardson, who thoroughly knew him, consider his whole character to have been influenced by the straitened circumstances in which he was placed, that he used often to say, "If an enchanter could, by the touch of his wand, endow Sheridan suddenly with fortune, he would instantly transform him into a most honourable and moral man." As some corroboration of this opinion, I must say that, in the course of the enquiries which my task of biographer imposed upon me, I have found all who were ever engaged in pecuniary dealings with him, not excepting those who suffered most severely by his irregularities, (among which class I may cite the respected name of Mr. Hammersley,) unanimous in expressing their

CHAP. XXI.

conviction that he always *meant* fairly and honourably; and that to the inevitable pressure of circumstances alone, any failure that occurred in his engagements was to be imputed.

There cannot, indeed, be a stronger exemplification of the truth, that a want of regularity *

* His improvidence in every thing connected with money was most remarkable. He would frequently be obliged to stop on his journeys, for want of the means of getting on, and to remain living expensively at an inn, till a remittance could reach him. His letters to the treasurer of the theatre on these occasions were generally headed with the words, "Money-bound." A friend of his told me, that one morning, while waiting for him in his study, he cast his eyes over the heap of unopened letters that lay upon the table, and, seeing one or two with coronets on the seals, said to Mr. Westley, the treasurer, who was present, "I see we are all treated alike." Mr. Westley then informed him that he had once found, on looking over this table, a letter which he had himself sent, a few weeks before, to Mr. Sheridan, enclosing a ten-pound note, to release him from some inn, but which Sheridan, having raised the supplies in some other way, had never thought of opening. The prudent treasurer took away the letter, and reserved the enclosure for some future exigence.

Among instances of his inattention to letters, the following is mentioned. Going one day to the banking-house, where he was accustomed to be paid his salary, as Receiver of Cornwall, and where they sometimes accommodated him with small sums before the regular time of payment, he asked, with all due humility, whether they could oblige him with the loan of twenty pounds. "Certainly, sir," said the clerk, — "would you like any more — fifty, or a hundred?" Sheridan, all smiles and gratitude, answered that a hundred pounds would be of the greatest convenience to him. "Per-

becomes, itself, a vice, from the manifold evils to which it leads, than the whole history of Mr. Sheridan's pecuniary transactions. So far from never paying his debts, as is often asserted of him, he was, in fact, always paying; — but in such a careless and indiscriminate manner, and with so little justice to himself or others, as often to leave the respectable creditor to suffer for his patience, while the fraudulent dun was paid two or three times over. Never examining accounts nor referring to receipts, he seemed as if (in imitation of his own Charles, preferring generosity to justice,) he wished to make *paying* as like as possible to *giving*. Interest too, with its usual, silent accumulation, swelled every debt; and I have found several instances among his accounts where the interest upon a small sum had been suffered to increase till it outgrew the principal; — "*minima pars ipsa puella sui.*"

Notwithstanding all this, however, his debts

haps, you would like to take two hundred, or three?" said the clerk. At every increase of the sum, the surprise of the borrower increased. "Have not you then received our letter?" said the clerk;—on which it turned out that, in consequence of the falling in of some fine, a sum of twelve hundred pounds had been lately placed to the credit of the Receiver-General, and that, from not having opened the letter written to apprise him, he had been left in ignorance of his good luck.

CHAP. XXI.

were by no means so considerable as has been supposed. In the year 1808, he empowered Sir R. Berkely, Mr. Peter Moore, and Mr. Frederick Homan, by power of attorney, to examine into his pecuniary affairs and take measures for the discharge of all claims upon him. These gentlemen, on examination, found that his *bonâ fide* debts were about ten thousand pounds, while his apparent debts amounted to five or six times as much. Whether from conscientiousness or from pride, however, he would not suffer any of the claims to be contested, but said that the demands were all fair, and must be paid just as they were stated; — though it was well known that many of them had been satisfied more than once. These gentlemen, accordingly, declined to proceed any farther with their commission.

On the same false feeling he acted in 1813-14, when the balance due on the sale of his theatrical property was paid him, in a certain number of Shares. When applied to by any creditor, he would give him one of these Shares, and allowing his claim entirely on his own showing, leave him to pay himself out of it, and refund the balance. Thus irregular at all times, even when most wishing to be right, he deprived honesty itself of its merit and advantages; and, where he happened to be just, left it doubtful (as Locke says of those religious people who believe right

by chance, without examination,) "whether even the luckiness of the accident excused the irregularity of the proceeding."*

The consequence, however, of this continual paying was that the number of his creditors gradually diminished, and that ultimately the amount of his debts was, taking all circumstances into account, by no means considerable. Two years after his death it appeared by a list made up by his Solicitor from claims sent in to him, in consequence of an advertisement in the newspapers, that the *bonâ fide* debts amounted to about five thousand five hundred pounds.

If, therefore, we consider his pecuniary irregularities in reference to the injury that they inflicted upon others, the quantum of evil for which he is responsible becomes, after all, not so great. There are many persons in the enjoyment of fair characters in the world, who would be happy to have no deeper encroachment upon the property of others to answer for; and who may well wonder by what unlucky management Sheridan could contrive, to found so extensive a reputation for bad pay upon so small an amount of debt.

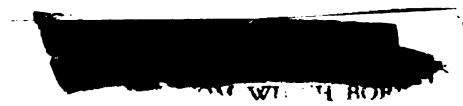
Let it never, too, be forgotten, in estimating this part of his character, that had he been less

* Chapter on Reason.

CHAP. XXI.

consistent and disinterested in his public conduct, he might have commanded the means of being independent and respectable in private. He might have died a rich apostate, instead of closing a life of patriotism in beggary. He might (to use a fine expression of his own) have "hid his head in a coronet," instead of earning for it but the barren wreath of public gratitude. While, therefore, we admire the great sacrifice that he made, let us be tolerant to the errors and imprudences which it entailed upon him; and, recollecting how vain it is to look for any thing unalloyed in this world, rest satisfied with the Martyr, without requiring, also, the Saint.

THE END.



U.C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES
C000658790